NEW

THE TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO DARK TOURISM

EXPLORE SOME OF THE WORLD'S DARKEST TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Over 145 sites, from catacombs to haunted castles

Chernobyl, Ukraine

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland

PASSPORT

Killed outside his apartment

Page 12

Digital Edition

FUTURE

FOURTH EDITION

ASSASSINATIONS • DISASTERS • COMMUNISM • TOMBS • WAR

VISIT…

WELCOME TO

THE TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO DARK TOURISM

With its macabre and morbid connotations, dark tourism provokes strong reactions – how can we, as humans, justify the commodification of history's most profound and devastating events? To assume that all dark tourism is exploitative is unfair, however; for many, it is an essential part of understanding the world's bloody and brutal past, and using history's teachings to inform and shape our future.

In The Traveller's Guide to Dark Tourism, we delve into what it means to be a dark tourist; uncover the ethics of such travel, including which destinations serve to educate and inform, as well as the dos and don'ts of visiting sites with sinister pasts. Elsewhere, explore some of the most significant sites to visit, from places that have been shaped by disasters – both natural and man-made – and battlefields of the world's defining wars, to the living legacy of Europe's recent history behind the Iron Curtain or the tombs and mausoleums of the most important leaders and revolutionaries.

DISCLAIMER

In light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, some destinations in this book are no longer safe to visit because the situation is unpredictable and could further escalate without warning. Where you see this icon, most governments strongly advise against all travel to these countries.

The content of this book was written prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, which has had a dramatic impact on global travel. As such, the locations, activities and websites mentioned within may no longer be available or appropriate, therefore this book should be used as a source of inspiration only. Always check the current travel guidelines when planning a trip, and adhere to any local restrictions at your destination.

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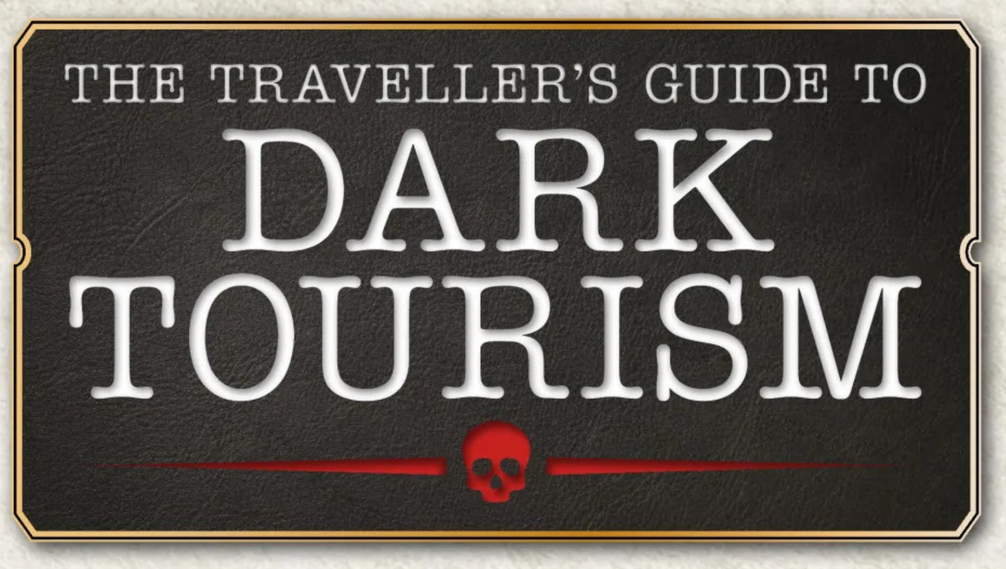
FUTURE



Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Philippa Grafton**
Designer **Emma Birch**
Compiled by **April Madden & Adam Markiewicz**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**

Contributors
Hareth Al Bustani, Sarah Bankes, Alice Barnes-Brown, Ben Biggs, Martyn Conterio, Nell Darby, Joanna Elphick, Mike Haskew, Katharine Marsh, Scott Reeves

Cover images
Getty, Thinkstock
Wikimedia Commons; Maros Mraz, Fanny Schertzer

Photography
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Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely, Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman**

Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk – for enquiries, please email:
mfcommunications@futurenet.com

The Traveller's Guide To Dark Tourism Fourth Edition (LBZ5341)
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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

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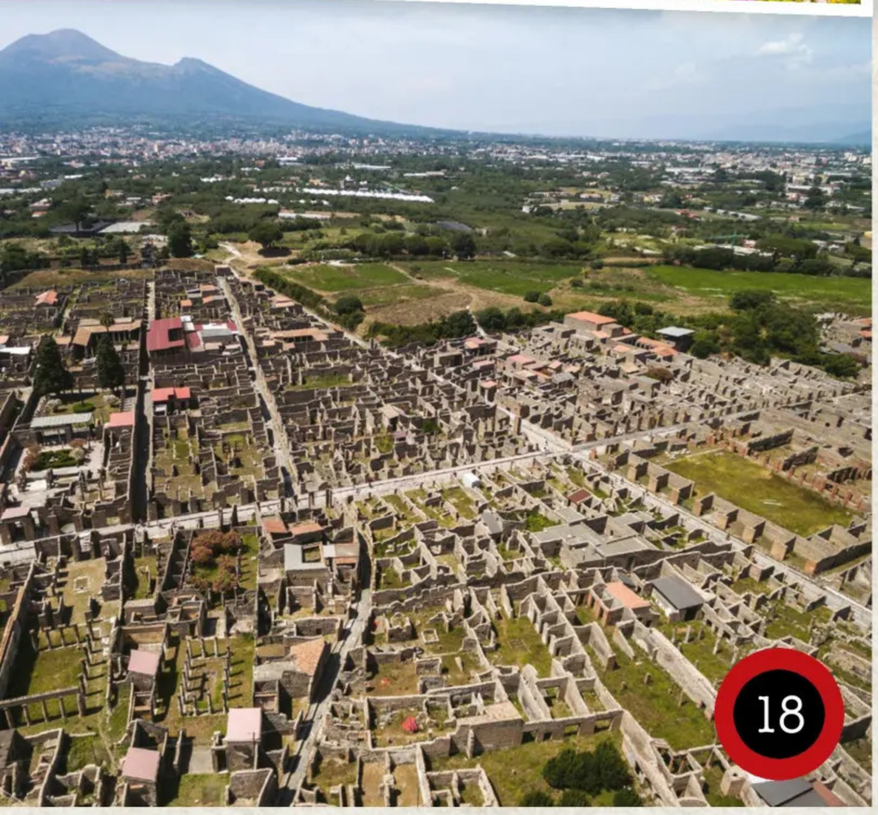

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ARE WE ALL DARK TOURISTS?

DARK TOURISM - THE VISITING OF SITES ASSOCIATED WITH DEATH, CRIME OR OTHER GRISLY SUBJECTS - HAS EXISTED FOR CENTURIES. BUT IS IT PART OF HUMAN NATURE TO BE DARK TOURISTS?

We have always been interested in the dark side of life: it's part of human nature to explore the sometimes unsavoury aspects of our existence in order to understand what makes us tick as a species. Many of us gravitate towards the ghoulish and macabre even if we can't quite vocalise or explain why it is that we are drawn to darker subjects. We seek them out in newspaper stories, exhibitions, museum artefacts and television programmes. True crime remains a popular subject for podcasts – *Criminal*, *Serial*, *My Favorite Murder* and *Unsolved* are just some of the recent series, and even the BBC initiated a podcast series based on the discovery of an unknown body at Saddleworth Moor, called *The Body On The Moor* (with an update provided when the body was eventually identified as Londoner David Lytton). It seems that the darker the subject, the keener we are to know more.

WHAT IS DARK TOURISM?

Dark tourism is an aspect of this fascination. It is the term given to a form of tourism that involves visiting sites and places that are associated with death, crime or tragedy in the past. Many visit such a site or place because of its historical significance, or because they want to learn from the experience, although there are undoubtedly some with a more ghoulish fascination with death or pain. There are a multitude of sites that can be described as dark tourism sites, as there's so much of our history that has a darker hue.

Some sites are associated with assassinations – think of the 'grassy knoll' in Dallas, scene of JFK's assassination on 22 November 1963 – while others were where masses of people were killed, such as Gettysburg or Auschwitz. A site might be a house, or a field; it might be something that survives almost intact, or simply a plaque on a restored or rebuilt building. In Fall River, Massachusetts, tourists flock to see where Lizzie Borden lived in the late 19th century. Lizzie is infamous for allegedly killing her father and stepmother with an axe in 1892 (she was actually acquitted, but is widely regarded to have been the killer). Today, you can stay in her former home – the murder site – as it has been turned into a bed and breakfast. Most visitors ask to stay in the bedroom where Lizzie's stepmother, Abby, was murdered, showing just how we are fascinated rather than repelled by a proximity to violent crime.

Image source: Dale Cruse

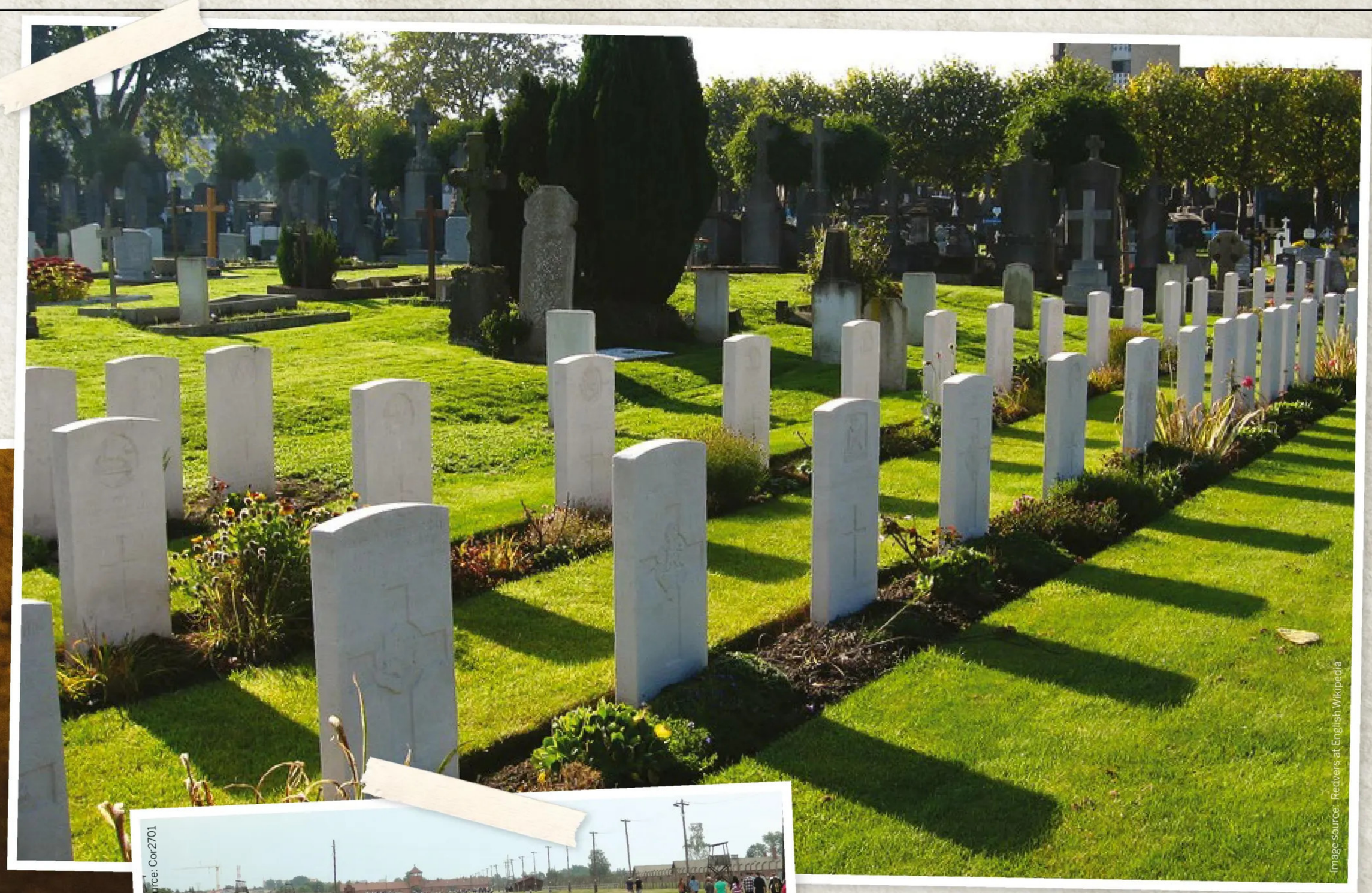

Image source: Reqvers at English Wikipedia

Image source: Cor2701

Top: Many schools run trips to World War I cemeteries, such as this one at Ypres, where the human cost of war is all too clear

Above: Officials have criticised Auschwitz visitors for posing for selfies on its iconic railway tracks

Left: Paris's catacombs have been a dark tourism site since the 18th century, when it was opened for visits by wealthy Parisians

Other dark tourism sites include prisons; many prisons that have been closed down have since become heritage sites open to the public. When Shepton Mallet and Shrewsbury prisons closed down a few years ago, they were opened to the public for a short duration, so visitors could see the places as they had operated until their closure. The peeling walls, spartan environments and abandoned furniture showed the reality of prison life. Other prisons have been restored or modernised, filled with waxworks to denote scenes from the prison's past. Bodmin Gaol in Cornwall has waxwork recreations of some of its former prisoners; Wicklow Gaol in Ireland has a replica treadwheel in its grounds to show the mind-numbingly pointless work that former prisoners had to undertake. Such sites try to walk a line between education and entertainment, as shown in the existence of audio tours and gift shops.

THE HISTORY OF DARK TOURISM

This interest in the darker side of life is nothing new. Our ancestors, perhaps because of the presence of death in their everyday lives and the higher mortality rates of the past, were similarly interested. In Roman times, 'tourists' visited the gladiator games at the colosseum, watching humans fight to the death. In Georgian times, you could go to the site of a murder and see the murderer be put to death nearby, the link between the individual and the location where he or she killed being made explicit. Even in Victorian times, crowds would flock to watch a public

Hiroshima's Atomic Dome stands as a memorial to those who lost their lives

Image source: Thinkstock

hanging – at least until 1868, when hangings were moved to within prison walls.

In fact, the Victorians were keen dark tourists, even if they hadn't thought of such a term. They saw a public hanging as a day out, an opportunity to have a laugh, buy a souvenir broadside (pamphlet), to shout and jeer at the condemned as they were led to the scaffold. There was the opportunity to make money by selling the broadsides, or by providing refreshments to onlookers, or, if you lived close to the execution site, to charge money for spectators to use your window or balcony to obtain the best view of a hanging. Images of the condemned and transcripts of their purported confessions were sold to a crowd eager for a memento of the day, while others saw the opportunity to pick pockets, to pick fights, or to commit other crimes while the criminals were killed. Even Charles Dickens attended a hanging – in his case, the double hanging of the Mannings in 1849, outside Horsemonger Lane Gaol in London, after Marie Manning had enlisted her husband Frederick to help kill her lover, Patrick O'Connor. Dickens was so horrified by the pleasure others took in the event (between 30,000 and 40,000 were said to have watched the hangings) that he wrote to the papers calling for the practice of public hangings to end. It took another 19 years for this to occur.

Souvenirs have also come from darker sources: a piece of the scaffold, or the rope used to hang an individual; a death mask; or an item owned by the dead criminal. Nineteenth century newspapers frequently noted – either in articles or, later, in graphic illustrations – the presence of onlookers at murder scenes, the public being keen to gather where a murder had taken place, to gawp and to gossip. A particularly notorious form of dark tourism can be seen in the case of Jack the Ripper. From the moment

> "Souvenirs included the rope used to hang an individual, a piece of the scaffold, or an item owned by the criminal"

a series of murders in East London in 1888 started to be linked, 'tourists' gathered. Newspapers such as the *Illustrated Police News* included sketches of the murder sites, such as Miller's Court, where the final canonical victim, Mary Jane Kelly, had been killed in her bed, and both locals and those from further afield tried to get as close as they could, to experience the lives the victims had lived. A large number of people were reported to have attended the funeral of Kelly on 19 November 1888, at Leytonstone Cemetery, despite never having known her. Perhaps they wanted to show their sympathy for the murdered woman; but one suspects that others simply wanted to gain a vicarious thrill from being close to one of the Whitechapel murder victims. At the same time, an unknown person had chalked the words 'Dear Boss – I am still about. Look out. Yours, Jack the Ripper' on a blank house wall at Newnham Street, Whitechapel. The police quickly called for the lettering to be 'obliterated to avoid attracting a crowd'.

Cemeteries and other resting places for the dead have long been tourist 'attractions' and unlikely destinations for

WHAT (NOT) TO DO AS A DARK TOURIST

Follow these words of advice and you'll make the most of the dark sites you visit while remaining respectful of their history

DO SHOW RESPECT

Dark tourism sites are often associated with sad or tragic events. They may mark events far off in the past, or be about a more recent loss. All of them, though, deserve respect. Respect the physical locations and the memories of those involved with that site.

DO READ

Many sites feature interpretation boards that detail particular case studies or aspects of a site's history, helping you understand a site as you travel round it. Even outdoor sites, such as the Bosworth Battlefield, have such panels, and reading them will help you contextualise the places you visit.

DO LISTEN

There will sometimes be the chance to either take part in a guided tour (perhaps even with a costumed interpreter), or to listen to an audio-visual guide as you travel round a site. Do take advantage of these; without them, you may struggle to understand what happened, where and why.

DO BUY A BOOK

It's always worth reading a book about the site you're visiting to learn more about its history. You could read a book – or research the site online – before you visit, but also afterwards, to help you understand a particular part of the place, perhaps.

DO TELL OTHERS

If you found a site interesting or emotive, tell others. Many dark tourism sites are about the lives of ordinary people, so those who usually associate historical places with royalty and the elite might find they have a historical spark lit by your tales of your visits.

DON'T TAKE STUFF HOME

It sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised by how many people visit a tourist site and try and take a little bit of it home – even if it's just a stone or a flower. Dark tourism sites need to be treated with respect and kept intact.

DON'T MAKE JOKES

Dark tourism sites are often emotive places, conjuring up feelings of sadness, or even anger. What they are not the place for, though, is jokes, or laughing: don't make loud jokes about artefacts or stories, as others around you will not appreciate it.

DON'T TAKE SELFIES

Don't take selfies at the scenes of atrocities – think about the context. Officials at Auschwitz have had to ask visitors to respect the memory of the dead, as many were taking photos posing on the former camp's notorious railway tracks and posting them online.

DON'T GO TO SHOP

Go to a site to find out about its history. Don't get annoyed if there isn't a shop, or if there is one but it doesn't stock a sufficiently large selection of items for your needs. Likewise, you can't expect everywhere to have cafes or restaurants.

DON'T LITTER

As with any place, you should always leave it in the state you found it. If you've taken a drink or a snack with you, take the packaging or remnants home with you, unless a bin is provided. Don't drop litter during your visit – it's incredibly disrespectful to those remembered at the site.

Image source: ps_stardust

Image source: Rodw

entertainment. The Paris catacombs, for example, became a concert venue in the 19th century, the attraction lying in the juxtaposition between live music and the dead. During the 18th century, well-off Parisians visited the catacombs out of curiosity, and in the early 19th century they were opened to the public a few times a year. Public demand grew steadily, and, in 1874, the catacombs were opened for tourists for two Saturdays each month. Eventually, they had to be opened up daily to cater for the large number of people who wanted to look at the bones and skulls on display. Today, there are substantial queues of tourists waiting to gain entry to Paris's catacombs every day, and to other similar sites that are open to tourists, such as the Sedlec Ossuary in the Czech Republic, which sees 200,000 people visit it each year.

Dark tourism is not necessarily about death – just look at the number of men and women who visited asylums and prisons in the past to gawp at the unfortunate residents. A particularly popular destination was Bedlam, the infamous mental hospital, where individuals would pay for a guided tour of the institution, and the chance to laugh at or mock the afflicted. Although such tours are thankfully a thing of the past, today, dark tourists continue to visit the sites of former prisons and mental asylums, and to be shocked with tales of criminal punishments and mental health 'treatments'.

Visiting the final resting places of individuals is a related act of tourism. When Lord Byron died in 1824 in Greece, his body was brought back to Nottinghamshire to be buried. A century later, in 1923, a newspaper drew up a dark tourism itinerary to enable its readers to visit various famous grave sites, including Byron's – it was noted that local miners were available to guide visitors to the spot. It is clear that by the early 20th century, touring famous grave sites was seen as a perfectly legitimate activity to partake in, and the beauty of cemeteries and graveyards was used as a means of justifying such tours. Today, when famous people die, we line the route of their funeral cortege, or listen to the funeral service via loudspeakers outside a church. Are we really paying our respects, or is there a darker reason why we want to see evidence of death for ourselves, even when we didn't know the individual?

Above, left: Some sites are very much geared for tourists, but others are less so. Caxton Gibbet, in rather modern surroundings in Cambridgeshire, marks where the condemned were once hanged

Above, right: When Shepton Mallet Prison closed recently, a company reopened it temporarily for visitors, so they could see its rather rundown state

IS DARK TOURISM ETHICAL?

This leads into questions about whether it is ethical, or moral, to open up a site associated with death or crime. To charge an entrance fee; to sell memorabilia or souvenirs; to put up pictures of former inmates – can this be justified? There is sometimes a fine line between remembering individuals and in making them a gimmick. Take the existence of prisoner photographs that adorn the walls of both Oxford Gaol (now a visitor 'experience') and Liverpool's St George's Hall. They remind you both of the buildings' former use, and of the individuals once incarcerated within Oxford Gaol's walls, or tried within St George's Hall. Arguably, they make you realise the personal stories behind these buildings. Yet similar photos also adorn the bottles of a particular wine company, their products clearly designed to make money from the

The Sedlec Ossuary in the Czech Republic draws more than 200,000 visitors every year

Image source: Getty

A doll remains in the abandoned school in Pripyat, near the Chernobyl power plant

Image source: Thinkstock

lives and images of prisoners. There are ethical concerns regarding any use of those associated with crime, when those uses are designed to make money.

Many sites struggle to maintain a balance between education and entertainment, and as a result, they can appear to glorify grim events of the past. This is increased by the ubiquitous use of social media; the Clink Prison Museum in London, for example, has run a series of 'torture of the day' style tweets, which are designed to grab attention rather than provide a more nuanced exploration of its history.

However, it is also clear that dark tourism can help educate people. The best dark tourism sites clearly explain their past, and the issues involved, to their visitors. The Auschwitz site does so by its bleakness, and by artefacts: there are glass cases displaying evidence of the offences committed at the camp, including a display of mainly dark, decaying shoes once worn by those incarcerated or killed here. Another display case contains masses of suitcases, which were brought by victims to the camp, their names written in large letters on them. One of the saddest sights is the word 'Waisenkind' – 'orphan' in German – inscribed on some of the cases, a reminder of the children who carried them to a camp where they would be abused or

> "Visiting sites such as Auschwitz helps us understand the atrocities and their relevance to today's society"

killed because of their Jewish faith. These artefacts make for uncomfortable viewing, and also make you realise the sheer number of people who met their deaths during World War II. One could argue that the presence of such artefacts is unnecessary and disrespectful to those who died, and the presence of hair cut from some 140,000 Auschwitz victims, on public display, is certainly not for the squeamish. Yet it is by displaying such items that we recognise the inhumanity of those who inflicted pain on these individuals, and of their own humanity. These were people just like us, and by seeing their possessions – and their hair, taken from them whether they liked it or not – we can empathise with their plight.

Every year, schools arrange visits to Northern France to look at World War I battlefields and cemeteries. Again, sometimes there is power in simplicity, and the rows of identical headstones maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission show visitors the high human cost of war without the need for interpretation boards or audio-visual accompaniment. In other cases, though, such boards, audio tours and videos can help educate visitors of all ages, bringing history to life and highlighting, for example, the reasons for crime, such as poverty.

There are undoubtedly examples of dark tourism that are more ethically ambiguous. If a site presents an almost random selection of crime artefacts, presented with little meaningful or structured narrative and housed together with a selection of unrelated items, it's hard to see it as a site that wants to educate or inform visitors. For a dark tourism site to operate ethically, it needs to consider how it presents its artefacts, and how it tells its story. For visitors, an ethical presentation encourages them to behave ethically, too: to appreciate that these were once sites where their ancestors lived, fought or died.

History can be a dry subject to teach and to learn about, and visits to tourist sites can be a valuable way to bring the subject to life for schoolchildren. Visiting sites such as Auschwitz can help both children and adults understand atrocities from the past, but also show their relevance to today's society. By visiting where crimes were committed, by seeing evidence of individuals affected by these acts, they become real events, rather than a list of places or dates in a book. Their subject matter may be dark, but that does not mean they should be forgotten: in fact, the opposite is true. We need to learn from crime, and we also need to accept death as an inevitability rather than trying to deny it. By visiting cemeteries, prisons and catacombs, we learn about the human experience, both life and death. Some may view it as macabre entertainment, but many more get value from it as an educational experience.

Below: The iconic railway line leading into the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau

Bottom: A view of the infamous 'grassy knoll' at Dealey Plaza, Dallas, where JFK was shot in 1963. There is now a museum in the building where Lee Harvey Oswald pulled the trigger

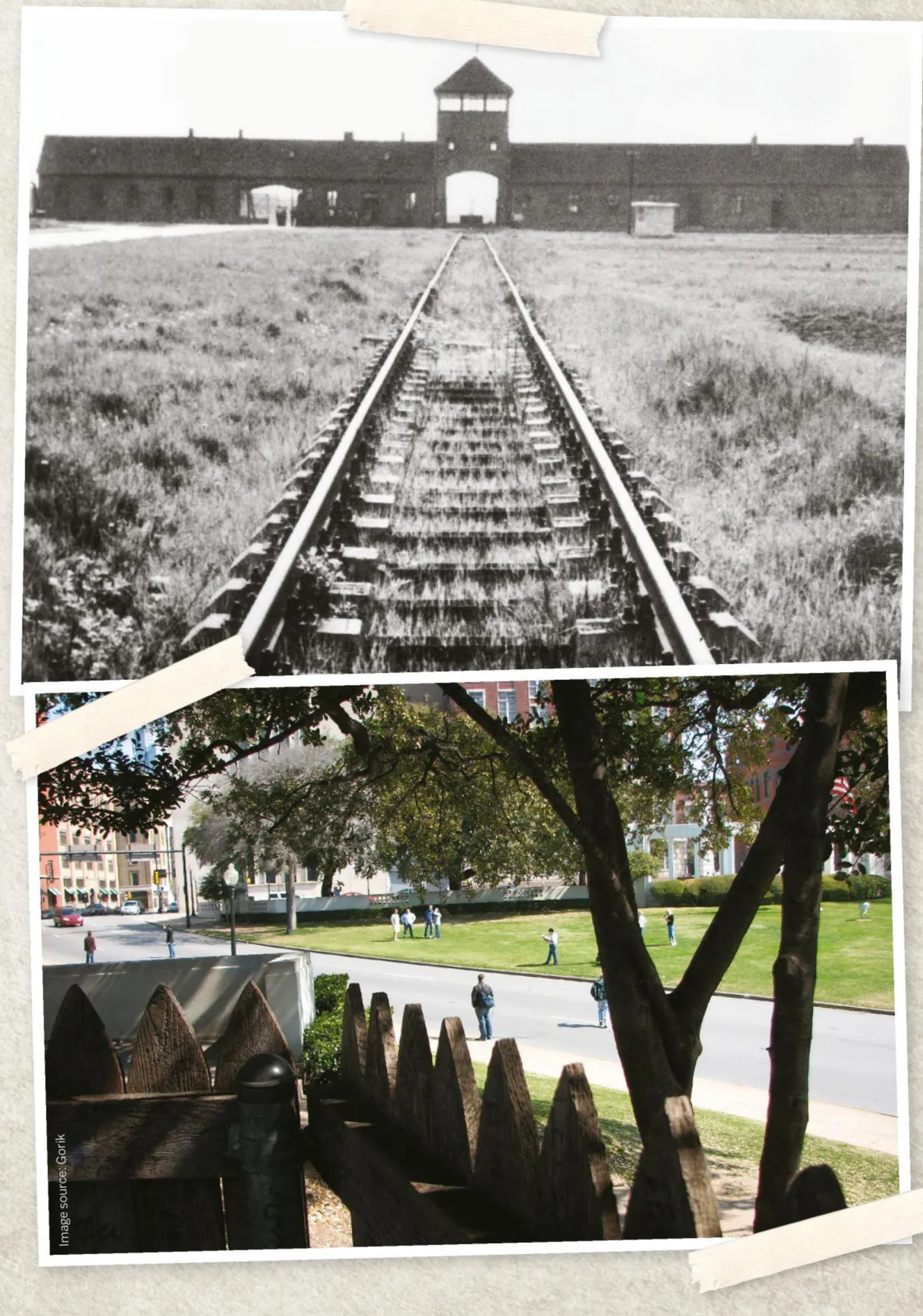

Image source: Gorik

DISASTERS

FROM NATURAL TO MAN-MADE, DISCOVER THE DISASTER DESTINATIONS THAT APPEAL TO DARK TOURISTS

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When Mount Vesuvius exploded in 79CE, the scale of devastation was appalling

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Experience underworld fire and brimstone before you shuffle off this mortal coil

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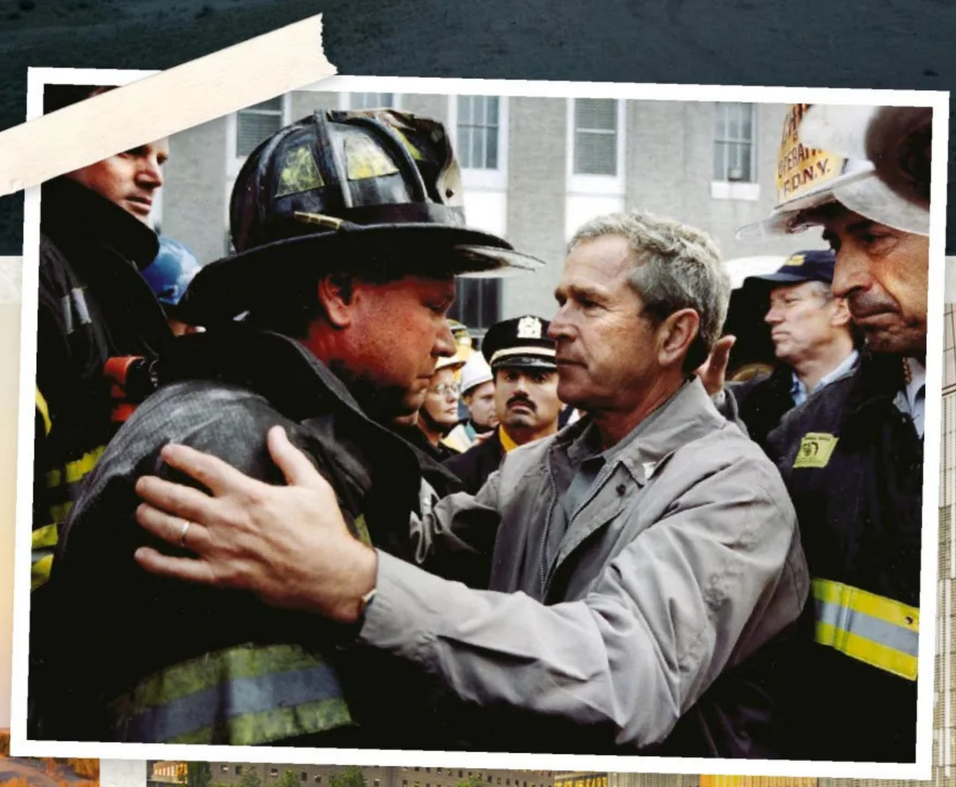

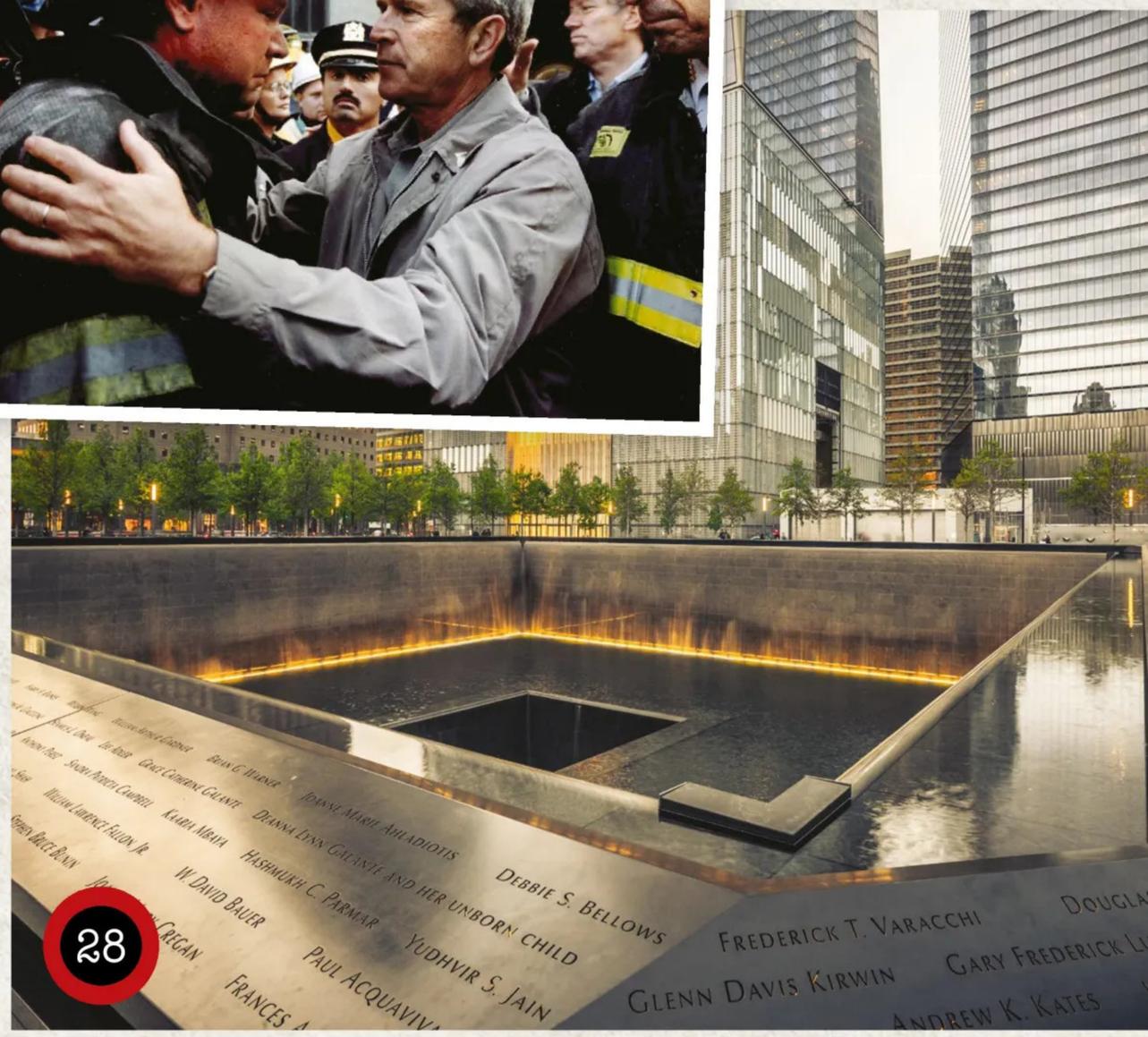

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1970

30

通行止
CLOSED

Image source: Getty

POMPEII

VISIT THE SITE WHERE MOUNT VESUVIUS EXPLODED

At the foot of a volcano in southern Italy lies one of the ancient world's most famous cities. For hundreds of years it lay forgotten, buried under layers of ash and dirt until it was until it was found, over a millennium later. Pompeii's demise should have been obvious right from the start – the city that would become famous for being buried in a volcanic eruption was built on a spur that had been formed by a prehistoric lava flow. Pompeii was a prosperous town, densely populated with 10,000 to 12,000 people, one-third of whom were slaves, over an area of three square kilometres. Being so close to the fertile slopes of Mount Vesuvius was nothing less than a boon, with hundreds of farms and villas just outside the town providing food and goods. The city also had the advantage of being almost right on the coast – the landscape of the Bay of Naples has since changed, making Pompeii seem further inland. In a way, Pompeii was a seaside resort, with villas providing grand views of the bay and the stunning scenery all around.

Above: The frescoes, like this one from Nero's villa Oplontis, used vibrant colours that have remained thanks to their preservation in the ash

Life in Pompeii was normal – that's perhaps why it's attracted such fame over the years since its discovery. It was as ordinary as Roman towns got, with an amphitheatre, baths and graffiti-covered walls. Thanks to the preservation caused by the eruption in 79 CE, we know how houses were laid out, the names of some of the homeowners, and how people spent their free time. But Pompeii wasn't the image of perfection – every few years, tremors would cause a little bit of trouble. It usually wasn't enough for people to pack up and leave, but from time to time it would cause some disruption and destruction.

In the year 79 CE, strange events started occurring. The fish that swam in the River Sarno began to float dead on the surface. Springs and wells dried up. The vines on the fertile slopes of the mountain began to wither and die. On the morning of 24 August, a deafening sound like a thunderclap echoed through the air. It was a sound no one had heard before – it was the sound of magma bursting through Vesuvius's crater. Smoke began to billow; the

Insert image source: Getty

mountain was on fire. People ran around terrified – some headed to the shore, hoping to be rescued, but by this point the volcano was spewing pumice. The rocks raining down from above blocked any access to the town by sea and people were trapped as more citizens tried to make their bids for freedom. As they hurried through the streets, the tremors began, violent enough to collapse entire buildings. Meanwhile a black cloud was growing from the mountain, and flashes of lightning were added to the mix.

In the evening, more pumice rained down on Pompeii, along with a considerable amount of ash. Ceilings buckled under the weight, crushing anyone who was sheltering underneath them. As night approached and the Sun shrank behind the horizon, the dark that swept over the bay was unwelcome. It was the end of the world – those still alive would never see the light of day again.

The dark, dense cloud became destabilised as the night wore on, and the first deadly pyroclastic surge – a river of poisonous gases – hurtled down the mountain at 100 miles an hour, headed straight for Pompeii. Everyone it touched was asphyxiated and they died where they stood.

At midnight, the cloud spilling out of Vesuvius' summit reached 30,000 kilometres before it collapsed. Another pyroclastic surge raged down the slope.

Morning didn't break the next day. For the most part, the south side of the Bay of Naples was deathly silent. A few people were still alive, huddled in the ruins of their towns under the dark cloud that loomed overhead. Terrified as they were, perhaps they didn't see their final moments coming as the cloud collapsed for the last time, sending the last deadly wave towards Pompeii. Anyone who had been left breathed no more as the force destroyed the buildings around them.

Over the years, the ash became more compact and layers of dirt formed on top of it. New cities were built on top of Vesuvius's destruction. Modern-day Pompei, Ercolano and Castellammare di Stabia were all resting atop a huge and heartbreaking tragedy that the world had forgotten. In 1748, excavations began in the region at a site that was simply named 'Civita', from the Latin word for 'town'. Thanks to fairly primitive archaeological techniques

Above: Graffiti was commonplace in Pompeii, and a lot of it has been preserved

Image source: Getty

Insert: Reading 'XVI K Nov', the charcoal graffiti was found on the wall of what is now known as the Garden House in Pompeii's Regio V

Bottom: The plaster casts of the victims are one of the most enduring images of the disaster

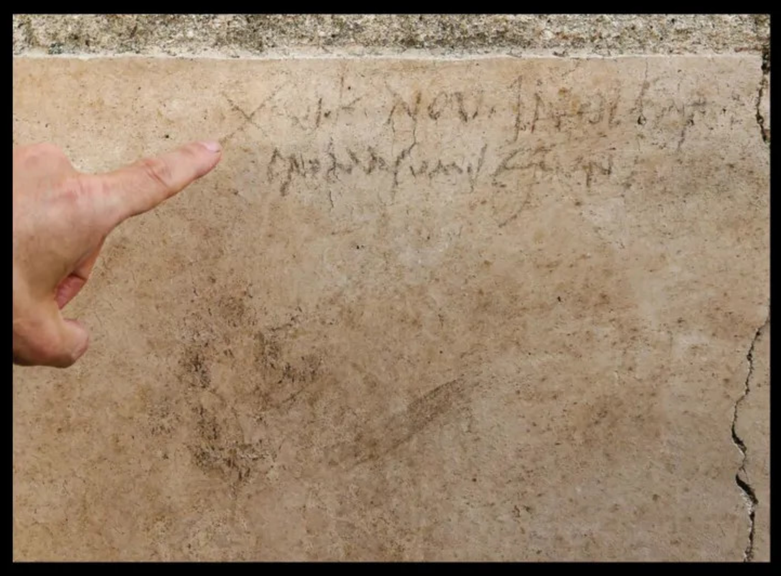
ARE WE SURE IT WAS IN AUGUST?

A humble charcoal scribble could drastically change what we know about one of the Roman Empire's most famous events

We were fairly sure we knew almost everything about the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. We knew which cities were destroyed in the blast, the type of eruption that occurred and an extraordinary amount of detail about the individual stages. But now we need to question how much of this is actually true.

The current excavations in Pompeii's Regio V have uncovered something that has called our understanding into doubt. Scrawled in charcoal on a Roman wall is "XVI K Nov", which means the 16th day before the Kalends of November, or 17 October in our current calendar. While there's no year attached to this piece of graffiti, it's pretty clear that the year was 79 CE. The house where it was found was in the middle of being redecorated, with some walls covered in plaster and others, such as that one, primed for a coat. It's also worth noting that the graffiti was written in charcoal, which wouldn't have lasted all that long on the wall if it wasn't for the eruption preserving it.

Now we're left with the arduous task of trying to figure out when exactly this volcano did explode – did people live two months longer than we previously realised?
Have we stuck with a mistranslation that caused us to have the wrong date for centuries? Perhaps more excavations will unveil some concrete evidence, but until then, we'll just have to wait and see.



Insert image source: Getty

at the time, some of the frescoes and other items were accidentally destroyed.

Things changed again when Giuseppe Fiorelli took up the project in 1863. His methods focused on conservation and he ordered his men to start at the top of the houses and work their way down to preserve everything that was discovered. Fiorelli was also the man who divided the town into the sections that we know today, and he did one more important thing. The type of eruption that had occurred in 79 CE had preserved everything extremely well, except for the victims themselves. However, what was left behind of them were holes in the shape of their bodies when they died. Fiorelli made plaster casts of these holes, which are now the images most associated with Pompeii.

You could say that the rest is history, but it's history that keeps on being discovered as excavations are taking place with more and more evolved archaeological techniques. The digs have never really stopped and a new area, Regio V, is currently in the process of being uncovered. Skeletons have been found, as well as walls painted a vibrant red and new buildings like the House of Jupiter. New techniques are being used like lasers and drones, and the plan is to eventually open the area up like the rest of the site.

The future of Pompeii looks brighter than its past. With international interest in the city, it attracts millions of visitors each year who come to walk in the footsteps of those who lived and died in the same spot almost 2,000 years ago. However, there's still a problem – something catastrophic. Vesuvius, the volcano that has always loomed ominously in the background, is supposed to erupt every 20 years or so. It hasn't since March 1944, and the next time it blows is supposed to be an event akin to that infamous deadly ordeal of 79 CE. Pompeii, Herculaneum and the other ancient towns in the area could be buried again, alongside the sprawling metropolis of Naples or the holiday destination of Sorrento on the other side of the bay. Will people be rediscovering our cities hundreds of years from now, walking where we walked? Only time will tell.

Below: Thanks to the work of archaeologists, we can see each flagstone in the streets and grooves left by carts

Bottom, left: It's possible to walk around the crater of Mount Vesuvius

Bottom, right: This skeleton of one unfortunate man was discovered in 2018

Image source: Getty

Image source: Alamy

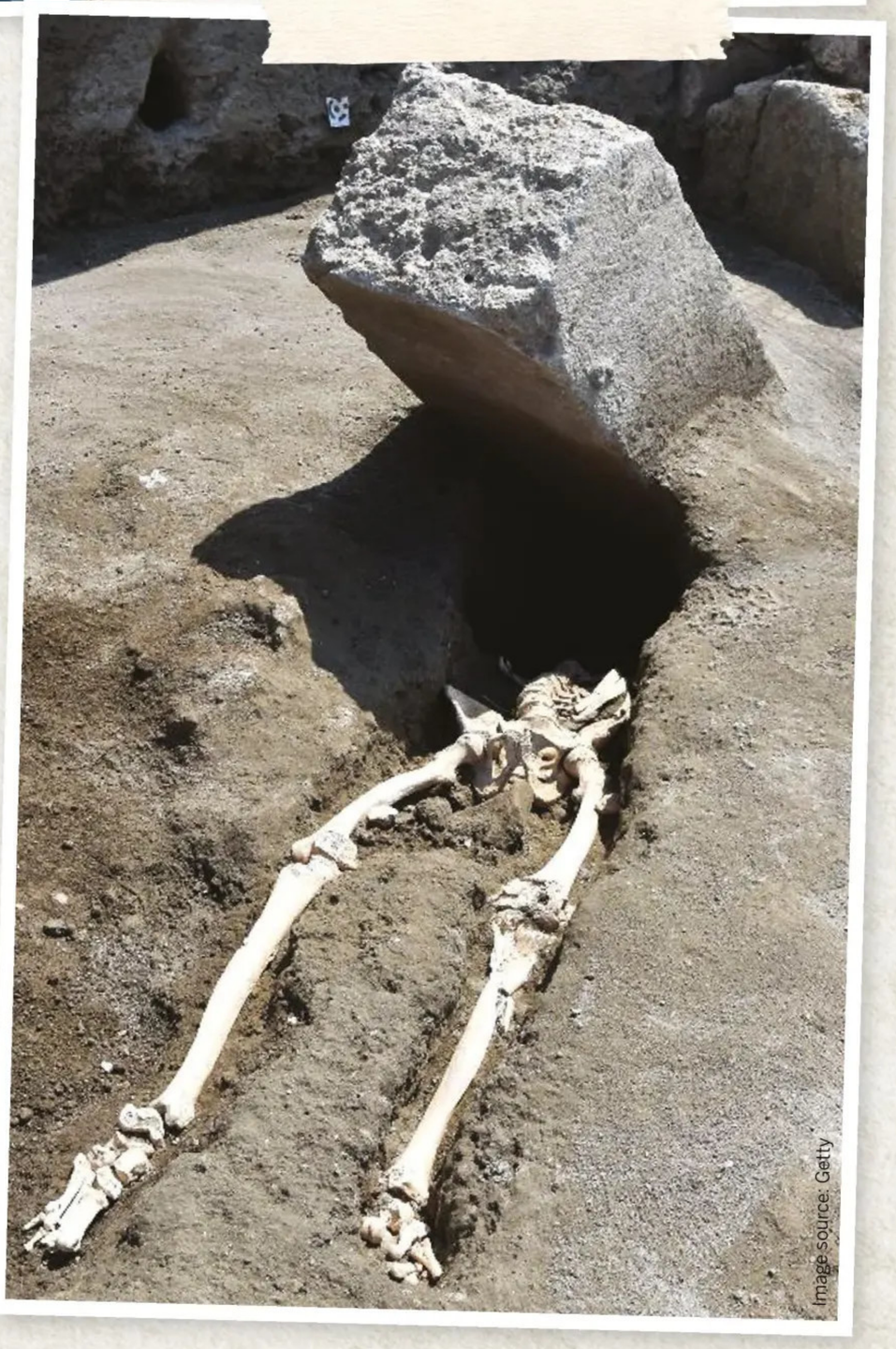


Image source: Getty

PRESERVING POMPEII

Looking after a city that's over 2,000 years old is far from an easy task

01 REGIO V

The current excavations are taking place here, uncovering a part of the city that hasn't seen the light of day since the eruption in 79 CE. New technologies like lasers and drones are being used to uncover the half-hectare area in what's been called one of the biggest postwar digs in the world.

02 VILLA OF THE MYSTERIES

From 1924 to 1961, a considerable amount of excavating took place. One of the buildings to be uncovered in this period was the Villa of the Mysteries, a well-preserved villa on the outskirts of Pompeii. Archaeologists also dug up most of Regio I and II.

03 VIA DELL'ABBONDANZA

While today this street makes up the majority of the 'Pompeii for all' walking route, it was heavily bombed during World War II, hampering excavation efforts. It was around this time that Vesuvius erupted again and parts of the area were evacuated.

04 HOUSE OF THE GLADIATORS

In 2010, tragedy struck. The House of the Gladiators, which had been struck during the bombing raid in the 1940s, suddenly collapsed after a bout of heavy rainfall in the Bay of Naples. Thought to be a relatively sturdy building, its collapse shocked many.

05 ADVERSE CONDITIONS

Because the city of Pompeii isn't covered by anything, it's open to the elements and that creates problems today. A lot of what has been uncovered by archaeologists over the years has suffered from wind, rain, light damage and even tourists and archaeologists themselves.

06 STILL UNDERGROUND

Just under one-third of Pompeii still lies unexcavated underground. Arguably, this is the safest place for the buildings as here they can't be damaged by the elements or the people constantly traipsing through. It's uncertain if digs will take place here in the future.

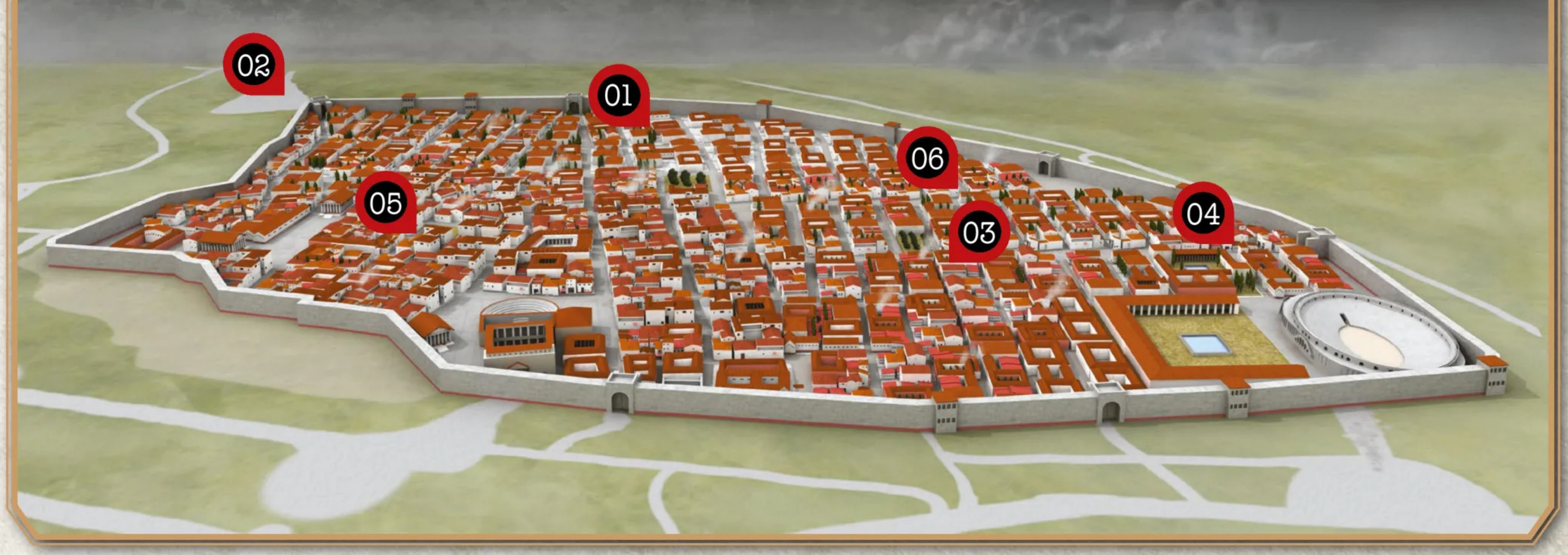


Image source: Getty

GATES OF HELL

EXPERIENCE UNDERWORLD FIRE AND BRIMSTONE IN TURKMENISTAN BEFORE YOU SHUFFLE OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

On this occasion the Kremlin hasn't denied responsibility for setting the world on fire, although the exact date when this Hadean pit was punched into the ground is still up for debate. Around 40 years ago (50 if you're a local Turkem geologist) during the Soviet occupation of modern Turkmenistan, the Russians were drilling at what they thought was the site of a large oil field near the village of Darvaza when their rig, camp and a huge circumference of desert around it collapsed into a deep crater. While peering over the edge and considering whether this would be a good time to defect, a careless worker flicked a cigarette butt into the pit and ignited the flammable gases escaping from it. Of course, the Soviets said they did it on purpose to burn off any poisonous gases and thus prevent a natural disaster. Engineers thought it would take just a few days for the inferno to die down and yet here we are, nearly half a century later, writing about the single reason you might visit the middle of the Karakum Desert.

Image: Getty

Above: People admire one of many golden statues of former 'president for life' Saparmurat Niyazov

The Gates of Hell is a 70-metre wide, 20-metre deep conflagration with livid orange flames that lick up the sides, and mud that boils out of its centre. Located 162 miles into a desert with few landmarks, natural or otherwise, this incandescent orange hellmouth is hard to miss, especially at night. Greek explorer George Kourounis recently descended into its 1,000-degree-Celsius depths by foot in a tinfoil suit to collect extremophile bacteria that live on the bottom. But most people who visit simply like to stare into this glowing abyss, or fry some eggs in a pan using Mother Nature's largest natural gas hob. Truthfully, there isn't really much else you can do here, and that's only if the Turkmen authorities let you visit.

As 'one of the world's most repressive countries', according to Human Rights Watch, it's not as if you can just

Insert image source: Benpaarmann

Image source: Bjørn Christian Tørrissen

Image source: Getty

hop on a plane to Ashgabat tomorrow, then find a local bus to Darvaza. The country is only marginally less locked down after the former 'president for life' Saparmurat Niyazov died – the same head of state who erected a golden statue of himself that rotated with the Sun in the country's capital – and President Berdimuhamedow took over. Foreign journalists get treated like lepers; independent travellers are sent back home. The only way you get to visit the Gates of Hell is via a convoluted visa process months ahead of your trip, which stands a chance being rejected on a whim, and by signing up for one of the officially sanctioned tour groups.

But if we've learned anything about modern travellers, bragging rights to unusual and exclusive destinations trump your garden-variety road trips across Southeast Asia every time.

Top: Ashgabat is the largest city in Turkmenistan

Above: Niyazov spent a fortune on gold statues of himself, including one called the Monument of Neutrality that rotates

Right: Merv was once a proud oasis city in the south east of the country, built along the Silk road. It was decimated by the Mongol invasion in 1221

TOTALITARIAN DISNEYLAND

Beneath the gilt surface of its major cities, Turkmenistan hides some troubling truths

It has the reputation of being the most unexplored, least accessible of the five 'Stans', and as such Turkmenistan has found its way on the bucket list of any intrepid Western traveller. Neighboured as it is by Iran and Afghanistan to the south, its repressive regime and appalling human rights record has been somewhat eclipsed on the world stage. Unsanctioned religions, independent media and any potential political opponents to president for life, the former Soviet Union bureaucrat Saparmurat Niyazov, were completely outlawed during his rule. Capital punishment was only recently abolished when President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow came to power following Niyazov's death. In 2011 it was ranked the third most corrupt country in the world, and it's still in the top 20 today. Discrimination against ethnic minorities is rife. Independent travellers who haven't jumped through bureaucratic hoops to obtain the appropriate visas may find themselves turned away at the border. However, bragging rights shouldn't be your sole reason to travel to this part of Central Asia.

Many that successfully enter Turkmenistan and visit its major cities, including Turkmenbashi and the capital Ashgabat, regard it as a kind of totalitarian Disneyland: ultra-modern ziggurats and towering gilt effigies of its esteemed rulers dot the urban landscape, while much of the country lives in relative poverty. The vast wealth of its natural resources, bigger than US oil and gas reserves, has not filtered down from the top despite Niyazov's lavish spending spree on urban glamourisation. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent cladding buildings in gleaming white marble, erecting monolithic art installations and gold statues in city centres, yet the streets are virtually empty, reserved for tourists and the country's elite.

Turkmenistan's lack of accessibility is mirrored in its landscape, with the majority of its expanse covered in one of the driest deserts in the world. Through this runs the old Silk Road, an ancient conduit of free trade and wealth, now redundant. The road passes through Ancient Merv, one of several UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Turkmenistan, alongside the old abandoned capital of Khwarazm in the north. If you plan on visiting these incredible sites you'll find getting into Turkmenistan is only half your problem, as leaving Ashgabat to venture into the Karakum desert is strictly controlled. Permission is required to venture beyond the city borders and you'll need to declare any stay longer than a weekend. Complying with your visa conditions is advisable and losing yourself in the desert is a bad idea: if you do make it back, you'll get much less than no sympathy from angry government officials.

Image source: Getty

CHERNOBYL

THOROUGHLY IRRADIATED BY A NUCLEAR ACCIDENT MORE THAN 30 YEARS AGO, PRIPYAT IS A CURIOUS, PEACEFUL AND MOST DEFINITELY DEADLY DARK TOURIST DESTINATION

Early Saturday morning on 26 April 1986, the 1,000-ton lid blew off reactor four at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, lofting deadly radioactive material into the atmosphere. The resulting ethereal dawn lightshow would be last that some in the nearby town of Pripyat would ever see. Sand was dumped onto the smouldering nuclear inferno by helicopter and a few weeks later the site was encased in a concrete sarcophagus, but the damage had been done. Two power station workers were killed immediately by the fire. Of the deaths that can be directly attributed to radiation exposure from the accident, 28 were emergency workers who knowingly went to their doom, succumbing to this invisible killer within a few months. A further 106 workers exhibited symptoms of acute radiation poisoning, while thyroid cancers increased in the Chernobyl area in the years after.

Gorbachev's decision to hide the world's worst peacetime nuclear disaster behind the iron curtain for 50 hours and let the country foot the clean-up bill itself nearly bankrupted the USSR. As the days passed and the rest of the world became aware of what had happened, state TV was quick to play down the disaster. One Soviet news channel ran with a shot that panned across the ruins of reactor four and the rest of the site, saying, "As you can see, there are no massive destructions on which Western mass media keeps insisting. What is damaged is only a block." Among the dozens of casualties from the incident was the USSR itself: like many citizens of Pripyat, exposure to the fallout from Chernobyl wasn't immediately fatal to communist Russia, but a sure and gradual killer.

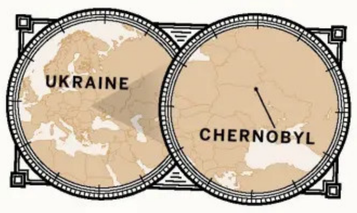
For the long-abandoned ghost city of Pripyat however, the iron curtain might as well have dropped on the day of the disaster. This closed nuclear city was founded in 1970 with the specific purpose of serving the power plant just a mile or two away. It was a sizable settlement at the time: it had 25 stores and malls, 27 cafes and restaurants, 15 primary schools and five secondary schools, 10 gyms, four factories, 35 playgrounds and a park, a railway

"After decades of human neglect, nature has taken over. It looks like the set of a Terminator movie"

Pripyat square: an eerily calm and quiet place that would be a haven for urban explorers were it not for the tight entry restrictions and deadly perils

CHERNOBYL

LOCATION



TIME ZONE

UTC +3

CURRENCY

Ukrainian hryvnia

TOP TIP

Locals swear by a few shots of vodka to protect them from radiation, but we suggest you follow your guide closely.

Image source: Getty

Left: Pripyat's hospital began filling up with casualties after the accident, but now it's as abandoned as the rest of the city

Below: The Pripyat city limit sign

Image source: Getty

Image source: Getty

"Pripyat still displays much higher-than-average levels of background radiation – some areas in the city will make a Geiger counter scream"

station, a hospital and three GP surgeries. All of this serving a population of nearly 50,000. On the morning of 27 April, citizens were told that they would be temporarily relocated to settlements around Kiev, and that they mustn't forget to "close windows, shut off electric and gas appliances, and turn off water taps." At 2pm the same day, buses arrived to take them away – never to return. By 29 April, the entire city had been evacuated.

Few dared to visit Pripyat in the decade or so following the accident, except tooled-up state researchers, looters with a death wish and the so-called 'stalkers' – explorers, for whom a dangerous, abandoned city declared off-limits by the authorities was like a red rag to a bull. Pripyat still displays much higher-than-average levels of background radiation today and there are small pockets in and around the city that will make your Geiger counter scream. Many are marked by an innocuous pile of sand that has been heaped onto the fallout by some brave soul, then stuck with a yellow and black radiation sign on a stick. Other hot spots, you'll have to rely on your equipment and a local guide to steer you safely past.

Entering Pripyat is a more surreal experience than you can possibly imagine. The 80-mile bus journey from Kiev to Chernobyl alone will give you a taste for the bare industrial landscape to come. Elevated gas pipes run alongside the road with cold, Perestroika-era buildings that sandwich small pop-up stores selling water and cigarettes to motorists. You'll reach the town of Chernobyl before the power plant, where you'll be as surprised as we were to see people still living and working, out of a sense of duty that is utterly lost on Westerners. And then there's Pripyat itself.

Crossing the 'Bridge of Death' down a potholed main road will take you straight into the heart of the city, the main square. It looks like the set of a new Terminator movie. Decades of human neglect has seen nature take over. Saplings have burst out of cracks in the asphalt, much of which is carpeted in a deep layer of green moss. Windows of the shops and restaurants are broken or completely missing. The disintegrating shelves and furniture inside have been exposed to the elements for years and are strewn around by looters and explorers. Soviet paraphernalia is everywhere – a rusting hammer and sickle proudly sits atop an abandoned highrise, while Cyrillic letters are dropping off the Palace of Culture. Construction on a shopping mall has been abandoned halfway through,

Below: Time, looters and explorers have turned the public library – as well as much of the city – into a ruin

Image source: Getty

Image source: Thinkstock

Image source: Getty

Image source: Thinkstock

as if the workers simply dropped their tools and left. Which they probably did. Bare steel rods stick out of the reinforced concrete like the bones of large animal: Pripyat is both a time capsule and a tomb.

The amusement park with its iconic Ferris wheel has proved the most popular site for tourists to visit on their tour through Pripyat, but more interesting places lie along the common route that guides will take you along. As we loop around to return to the bus, a door to a plain building is conspicuously ajar. Inside is an old doll, which looks almost deliberately placed in the centre of the store room. Leaning up against the bare concrete walls are several wooden boards, cut and painted to look like a nuke, a radiation sign and more Soviet symbols. Stage props perhaps, but they look relatively new. They don't seem faded or battered enough to have lain here since the 80s and maybe they haven't. Pripyat tours are fast becoming a lucrative business for locals – perhaps this is a dubious effort by one operator to give Western tourists exactly what they expect. As if the invisible dangers and dark history of this rotting Soviet city weren't enough.

Above: The Ferris wheel in Pripyat stands as an icon of the disaster

Above, left: The question is, was this staged before or after Pripyat was abandoned?

Above, right: The zone has become an unlikely haven for wildlife. These wild horses thrive, despite the radioactive hotspots

Right: The forest surrounding Chernobyl is particularly dangerous – soil and vegetation has absorbed a lot of the radiation

DODGING DEADLY RADIATION

Ten thousand people visit Pripyat every year – it's gotta be safe now, right?

Ukrainian officials say Pripyat will not be fit for permanent human habitation for another 20,000 years. But the nature of radioactive decay is such that it has been relatively safe for short visits and guided tours for more than a decade now. The radiation exposure of a typical guided tour is equivalent to that of a long-haul plane flight. So as ridiculous as this sounds, if you're comfortable with flying from the UK to the Ukraine and back, then you shouldn't be worried about a couple of hours in the radioactive exclusion zone.

Having said that, you will need to enter the zone with a qualified tour guide who knows the safe route around the hot spots, or with a well-equipped nuclear expert. Straying from the designated path poses a very real risk to your health. A wrong turn just outside the empty swimming pool in the city centre had our guide anxiously calling to us to come back. What lay farther down the apparently deadly direction we were about to take? Nothing more than a curious tree-lined path, apparently. And if you're foolish enough to wander then that's about as much warning as you'll get before it's too late.

Other hazards you'll want to be wary of is the dust, which is everywhere and more radioactive than the contents of your average hoover. So try not to disturb it, or breathe it in. And while background radiation drops to nearly normal levels inside the buildings, it leaps to dangerous levels in the moss and foliage outside. Plant life soaks up and concentrates radioactive particles – that's nature doing its bit for the clean-up effort.

Image source: Thinkstock

One of the two reflecting pools, surrounded by the bronze parapet inscribed with 2,983 victim names September 2001

GROUND ZERO

THE SITE WHERE THE TWIN TOWERS OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER USED TO STAND HAS BECOME A KEY LOCATION FOR DARK TOURISTS

Ground Zero, a term normally used to denote the hypocentre of a nuclear explosion in atomic testing, is almost certainly the most popular dark tourist attraction in the entire world, with millions of people visiting the site every year. Standing on the spot where nearly 3,000 people were killed during the worst terrorist attack in modern times clearly pushes the location to the top of the dark tourist sites, but this is far more than your typical macabre setting for 'rubberneckers'. 11 September 2001 was a devastating point in history where time itself seemed to stop and, for the briefest of times, the world was united in its despair. It was inevitable that any resulting monument would be controversial.

Many argued that any memorial be a tomb, since over a thousand bodies still lay in the bedrock of the site. Others desperately needed a definitive place to grieve and remember. The latter won and, ten years later, a memorial appeared in the form of two reflecting pools that cover the exact footprint of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. It is a beautiful and tranquil place where waterfalls pump 26,000 gallons of water per minute, tumbling into a second opening through which the water disappears, only to be recycled back to feed the waterfalls again. The bronze parapets surrounding the pools are inscribed with the names of victims, where loved ones can place flowers and messages. Certain areas have been given over to the brave firefighters who gave their lives in the line of duty. Groves of white oak trees soak up the noise of the city, creating an uncanny quietness. Of most interest is the so-called 'Survivor Tree', a pear tree that was originally standing between the towers and somehow remained upright after all the dust had settled. This free space allows anyone to sit and contemplate their own fleeting time on Earth, as well as remembering the terrible fate of others.

Below: Tears were wept around the world when the two towers were struck by aircraft on 11 September 2001

Insert image source: Robert

Image source: Thinkstock

Image source: Getty

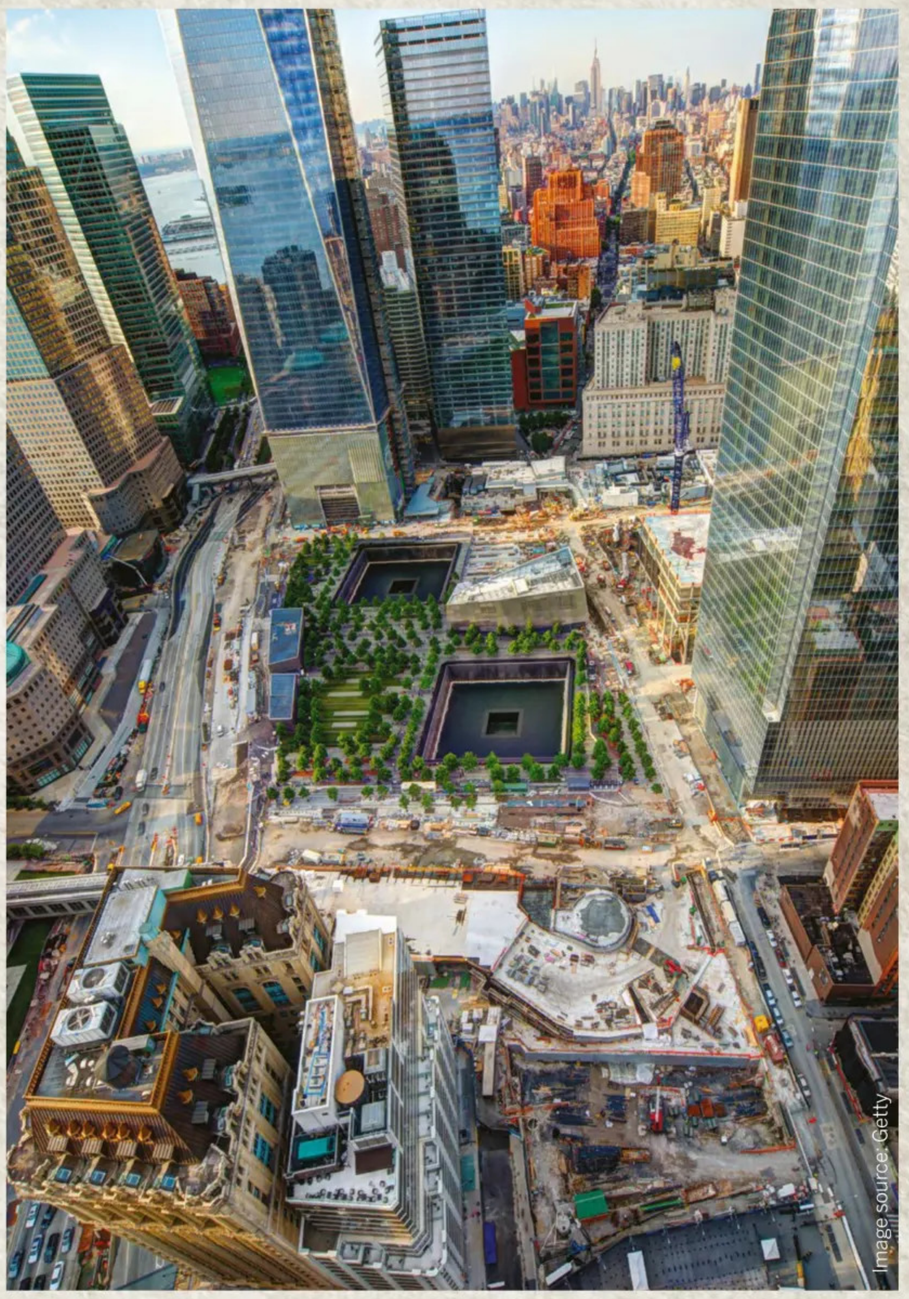


Image source: Getty

Left, top: An aerial photograph showing the level of destruction at Ground Zero

Left, bottom: Many firefighters lost their lives trying to save others from the towers

Right: An oasis of calm and tranquillity, dwarfed by the surrounding skyscrapers, has grown out of the disaster site

The National 9/11 Museum tells the story of this tragic moment in history and is without a doubt one of the darkest museums in the world, giving a second-by-second account of the people who lived and died at the scene. The museum itself is predominately underground, directly beneath Ground Zero. This in itself is a sobering thought, but as tourists solemnly file past the 'Last Column Standing', the final remaining piece of the World Trade Center's foundations, it is impossible not to feel the weight of the place and the suffering that hangs in the air here. Dark tourists are given the opportunity to walk past the 'Survivors' Stairs', various pieces of mangled steel and the only intact window pane and ultimately gaze upon the 'Wall of Faces'.

This is so much more than your average ghoulish dark tourist attraction, although the accompanying souvenir shop is lurid to say the very least and is still highly contentious among the victims' families. It is a part of America's darkest recent past, indelibly burned into New York's psyche, and it deserves the time and respect of anyone who takes a trip to this vibrant city. The reflecting pools are free to visit and, although the museum is expensive, it seems almost disrespectful not to give it your time. Only the hardest of hearts will fail to be moved.

HOPE AND HEALING AT GROUND ZERO

Straight after the tragedy emotional pop-up memorials appeared all over the city, but one location was particularly poignant

St Paul's Chapel, opposite the World Trade Center, somehow survived, and has become an important focal point for expressing emotions regarding the attack. Initially the fence surrounding the little church was covered in 'missing' messages, and the heartbreaking sight was quickly picked up by the media. Those desperately trying to find information about a loved one, hoping to make contact, knew to come here. Equally touching, the firefighters came to rest, contemplate and pray after their time sifting through the rubble in order to find survivors or, as time went on, bodies.

Visitors to Ground Zero started leaving offerings of support and solidarity at the Chapel, and this was eventually turned into an exhibition titled 'Unwavering Spirit – Hope and Healing at Ground Zero'. The building also housed special works of art, acting as memorials, designed by local artists expressing their pain, and dedicated to grieving New Yorkers who had lost loved ones. Teddy bears, poems, flags and flowers were regularly piled up outside, and eventually brought within the confines of the church for safekeeping. An accompanying souvenir shop was set up and people started giving talks and tours along the outside fence, in the shadow of the destruction. As time passed by the missing messages stopped, which in itself is heartbreaking, but the chapel remains a key location for dark tourists after they have visited the 9/11 Memorial Museum and need a place to process all that they have witnessed. Both St Paul's Chapel and the shop are free of charge.

Image Source: Getty

Image source: Getty

LOCATION

TIME ZONE

UTC+9

CURRENCY

Japanese yen

TOP TIP

Aside from the health risks, people who stumble into the exclusion zone can be arrested and fined.

FUKUSHIMA

DISCOVER THE FALLOUT FROM THE DOUBLE DISASTER OF 2011

It was mid-afternoon when the first disaster struck the Japanese prefecture of Fukushima. At 2.46pm local time on 11 March 2011, a magnitude 9.1 earthquake – the fourth-largest since records began in 1900 – occurred 43 miles east of Japan. The shifting bed of the Pacific Ocean triggered a tsunami, the waves of which travelled as far as six miles inland when they breached the coast a little under an hour after the initial earthquake.

The tsunami not only devastated a long stretch of Japanese coastline, it also led to a second disaster when 13-metre high waves crashed over the sea wall of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Three of the six reactors were already dormant due to scheduled refuelling; the other three were quickly shut down after the earthquake's tremors were felt. With the power plant out of action, emergency generators automatically turned on to operate the reactors' vital cooling systems. However, the tsunami flooded the diesel generators, causing them to fail. Battery backups lasted only for a few hours, after which the power plant was a ticking time bomb as the fuel rods melted and temperatures increased. Over the next three days, frantic workers were unable to prevent three nuclear meltdowns and a series of explosions that released radioactive material.

Above: Nature has begun to reclaim the abandoned town of Okuma within the exclusion zone

The Japanese government ordered the evacuation of all inhabitants within 12 miles of the power plant, but the ongoing clean-up operation has seen the large exclusion zone gradually shrink as the land is slowly decontaminated. For six years the small towns of Odaka, Namie and Tomioka stood empty except for diligent workers in protective chemical suits. Residents are now allowed to return, although a year on from the lifting of the evacuation order, only 500 or so hardy trailblazers had returned out of Namie's pre-disaster 21,000 residents.

However, any visitors who choose to join them – perhaps staying overnight in Namie's pioneering guesthouse – will find people willing to talk about their

Insert image source: Getty

Image source: IAEA Imagebank

Image source: IAEA Imagebank

Image source: Abasaa

experiences on that fateful March day when they were given minutes to pack up and leave.

For an even closer glimpse of the terrifying nuclear fallout, book a guided tour to Futaba and Okuma inside the exclusion zone. These ghost towns are almost entirely uninhabited, although you may stumble across a former resident keeping a watchful eye on their abandoned community in the hopes of an imminent return.

Haunting relics of the tsunami and nuclear evacuation are everywhere. The deserted wards of the abandoned Futaba Hospital give an indication of how much effort it must have taken to evacuate bedridden patients and those who sought sanctuary. School bags still sit on desks in Kumamachi Elementary School, left by students who were ushered out of their classroom by frightened teachers, never to return. Fields have been stripped of topsoil and grass as the painstaking work of decontaminating the ground continues. Yet even here, life goes on. Although some areas will remain off-limits for years to come, there are plans to open newly built residential apartments in the safe areas of Okuma.

It's even possible to get a distant view of the nuclear power plant itself from the shrine at the top of a hill in the deserted village of Morotake. Around 50 people survived the tsunami on the hilltop by running up its slopes when the waves hit, but little did they know the critical damage that the flood had caused down the coast. The power plant looks surprisingly untouched from this distance, but the legacy of Fukushima's tsunami and nuclear accident will last for decades, if not centuries.

Above, left: Rubble from the disaster is cleared in December 2012 to prepare for construction of a cover

Above, top right: The International Atomic Energy Agency sent experts to assess the situation in Fukushima in 2013

Above, bottom right: A radiation hot-spot was found in Kashiwa in the months after the disaster and a town square was cordoned off

FUKUSHIMA'S FORGOTTEN DISASTER

Rediscover the hidden carnage of the tsunami

Although the world's press focused on the nuclear power plant in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, there were no deaths from radiation exposure in the weeks and months that followed. The tsunami, however, caused instant death and devastation. Over 10,000 people were killed by the vast waves, swept away to horrific deaths by drowning. More than a million buildings were damaged, leading to mass homelessness. Around 4.4 million households were left without electricity and 1.5 million without water.

It is still possible to retrace the watery trail of destruction in Fukushima Prefecture. One of the few positive stories can be found at Ukedo Elementary School, just 200 metres from the Pacific Ocean. Teachers ignored calls for students to remain inside the school when the tsunami warning was given and evacuated all 80 pupils to the top of a nearby hill. It was the correct choice. Nobody from the school died when the waves, which reached to the top of the gymnasium wall, hit the school.

Much of the damage caused by the tsunami was located within the nuclear evacuation zone, and the devastation caused by the water was overshadowed by the battle to contain the potentially lethal radiation from the power plant. Perhaps that is why the tsunami has become the forgotten part of the Fukushima disaster.

Image source: Alamy

ARAL SEA

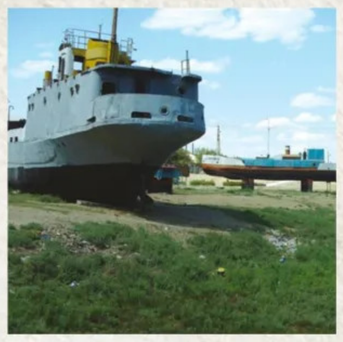
EXPLORE THE ECOLOGICAL TRAGEDY OF THE SEA THAT TURNED INTO A DESERT

In 1960 the Aral Sea was the fourth-largest lake in the world. The vast inland sea on the border between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan had a thriving fishing industry that employed 40,000 people and provided one-sixth of the USSR's entire fish catch. Just 60 years later, what was once a body of water larger than Sri Lanka has shrunk to less than half the size of the Falklands. The rest of the once-mighty lake is a toxic desert.

The collapse of the Aral ecosystem was a man-made disaster. Soviet engineers were to blame, having diverted the two rivers that fed the Aral Sea to irrigation projects that fed the surrounding desert so farmers could grow the thirsty cotton plant. However, the canals and channels were crudely constructed, not waterproof and prone to leak, meaning that up to three-quarters of the water they carried was wasted and never reached the cotton fields. With most of the Aral Sea's water supply shifted elsewhere, its water level began to decline, the rate of loss accelerating beyond the collapse of the USSR as the new Uzbek government continued to use the old, wasteful Soviet irrigation system in a desperate attempt to prop up its failing cotton industry.

Above: Contaminated dust and soil has blown as far afield as Norway, Greenland and the Antarctic

Below: The retreat of the sea has devastated formerly prosperous communities like Aral in Kazakhstan



The inevitable effects of such large-scale landscaping were acceptable to the Soviet leadership, who regarded the Aral Sea as 'a mistake of nature'. However, the ecological disaster had far-reaching implications, and a profound human cost on the people who called the region home. Modern visitors see evidence of this as they approach the Aral Sea from the north via the Kazakh town of Aral, or from the south via the Uzbek town of Muynak. Both were once prosperous fishing ports with large fleets of boats going onto the water with hopes of landing a big haul. Now it takes a trip in an off-road vehicle to reach the water, such is the distance that the Aral Sea has receded. A stone pyramid in Moynaq marks where the waterside used to

Insert image source: Yorian

be. Now the arid desert stretches beyond the horizon, but perhaps the most poignant monument to the lost lake are the graveyards of abandoned fishing vessels. Boats that bobbed in the Aral Sea now sit rusting on parched ground.

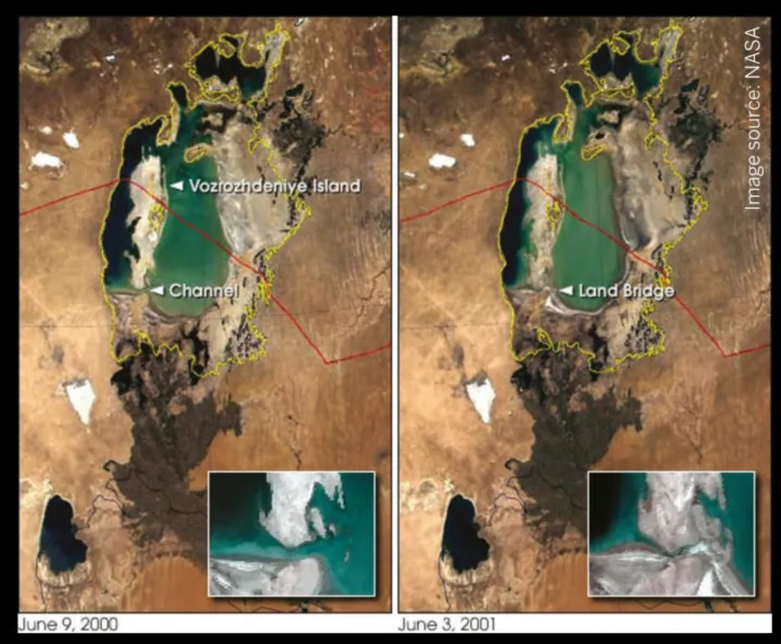
What was once the sea bed is now the Aralkum Desert, with sea shells and dried sea plants looking awkwardly out of place amid the arid dust. The poor-quality soil is heavily polluted with pesticides and chemicals, and its location underneath a powerful airstream means that Aral dust has been found as far away as the Antarctic. Even though the Aral Sea survives in some form – it has split into two smaller lakes, the North Aral Sea and South Aral Sea – the water has changed beyond recognition. Salinity levels have rocketed, with marine life finding it impossible to survive in water with more salt in than the Dead Sea.

Although the picture is depressing, there is a sliver of hope for the future. A dam was constructed in 2005 across a portion of the North Aral Sea. Although it effectively seals the fate of the southern lake, which appears destined to dry up completely, it does mean that the North Aral Sea is beginning to recover. The trickle of water from the Syr Darya River is enough to slowly raise water levels and decrease salinity, allowing some fish to return and survive, while the sea's edge is inching back towards the town of Aral. While emergency measures may save the Aral Sea from disappearing completely, replenishing it will take a lot longer than it took to deplete.

Top, left: Fishing boats look out of place in the desert, but were used only a few years ago

Top, right: Vozrozhdeniya Island became connected to the mainland in 2001, and the sea has now completely receded

Above: The stone pyramid at Muynak marks the former position of the Aral Sea's edge – now there is nothing but desert



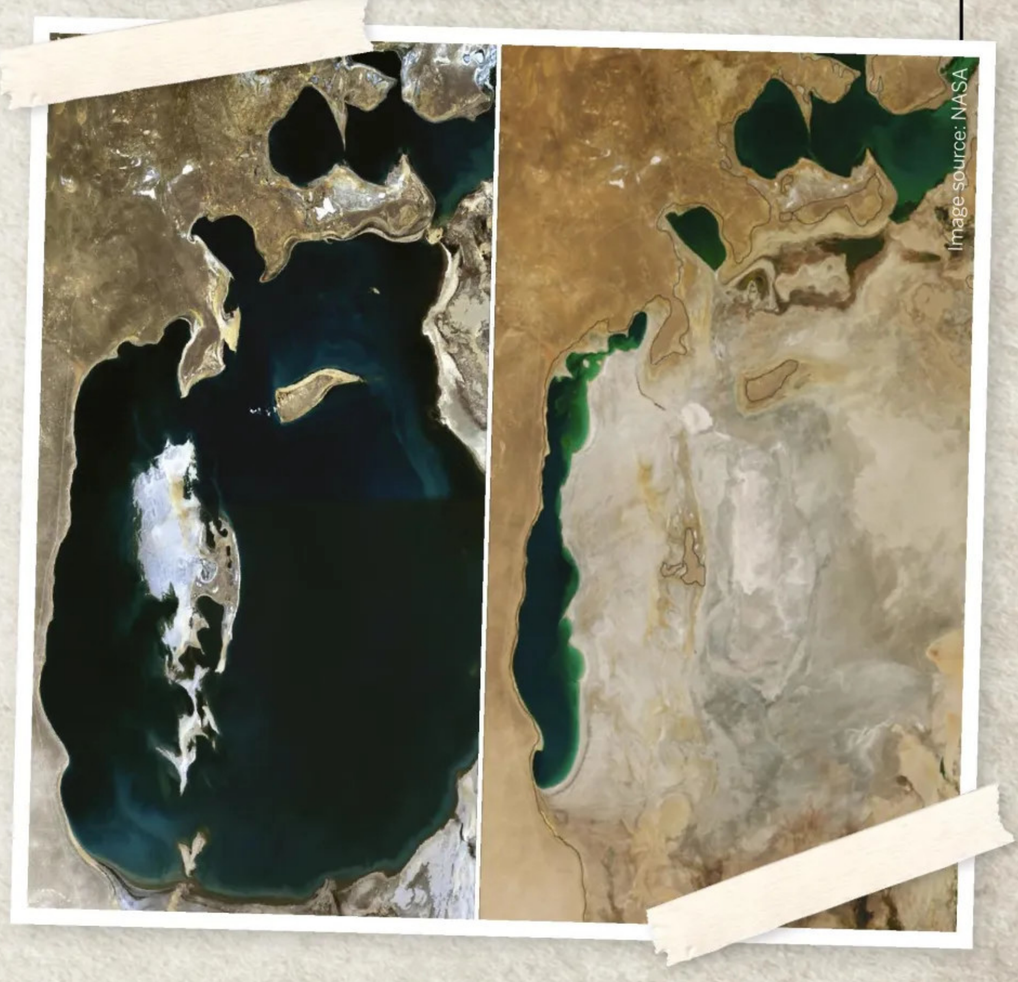
REBIRTH ISLAND

Uncover the Aral Sea's toxic secret

When the USSR needed a remote island for a secret military testing ground, the Aral Sea's Vozrozhdeniya Island – a name meaning Rebirth Island – looked perfect. From 1948 the top-secret Aralsk-7 complex became a biological warfare research station, developing fatal diseases for military use. It was a risky business – an accidental release of smallpox killed three people in 1971 – but research continued until the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Meanwhile, the waters that made Vozrozhdeniya Island an ideal secret base were fast disappearing. As the Aral Sea shrank, a peninsula emerged to link it to the mainland in 2001. Seven years later, the last water retreated and the former island became indistinguishable from the newly exposed desert around it.

Vozrozhdeniya is now home to a ghost town, Kantubek, where 1,500 scientists once lived. However, the sudden abandonment of the research facility during the death throes of the Soviet Union means that it is not a recommended place to visit. Many of the containers holding the potentially fatal biological agents were not destroyed or disposed of properly, leading to leaks of hazardous materials. Although decontamination work is aiming to make Vozrozhdeniya safe again, Rebirth Island is currently a place of death.



Right: The Aral Sea's swift retreat between 1989 and 2014 is clear on satellite images

ASSASSINATIONS

UNCOVER THE SITES THAT STAND AS A MEMORIAL TO THOSE BRUTALLY SLAUGHTERED IN PUBLIC

36 ROMANOV EXECUTION SITE, RUSSIA
Executed by the Bolsheviks, the last tsar and his family lay in a nondescript meadow for decades until their bodies were discovered

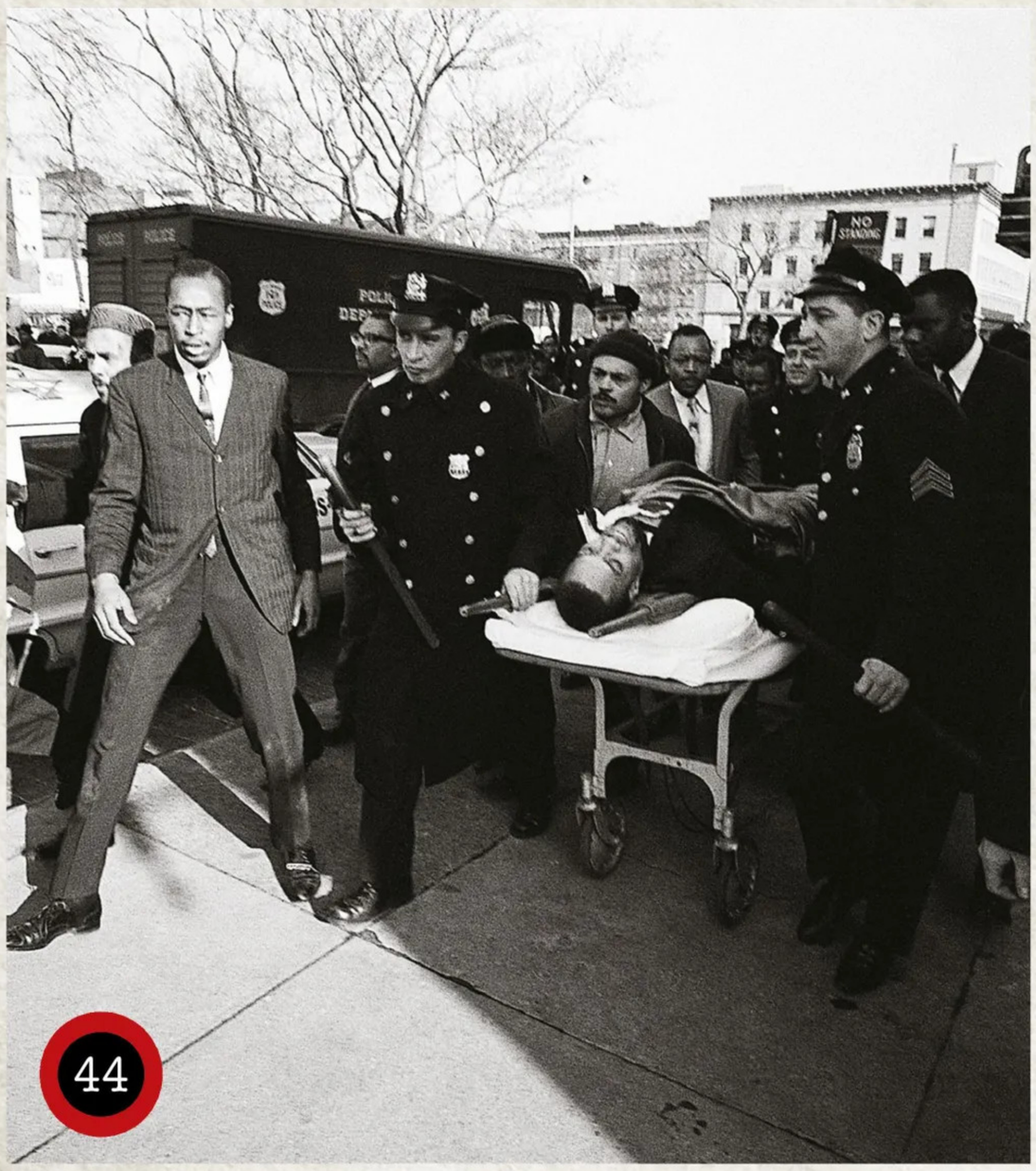
38 ASSASSINATION OF JFK, UNITED STATES
The US president was killed in a motorcade in Dallas, now a major tourist destination

40 THE CHE GUEVARA TRAIL, BOLIVIA
Che Guevara's final journey has been transformed into a socialist pilgrimage

42 THE MURDER OF JOHN LENNON, UNITED STATES
The Dakota building in Manhattan is where the Beatles legend was gunned down

44 OTHER BRUTAL SLAUGHTERS
Uncover more of history's devastating executions that shocked the world

40



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Tsar Nicholas II, his wife and children. All would be executed at Ipatiev House

Image source: Getty

ROMANOV EXECUTION SITE

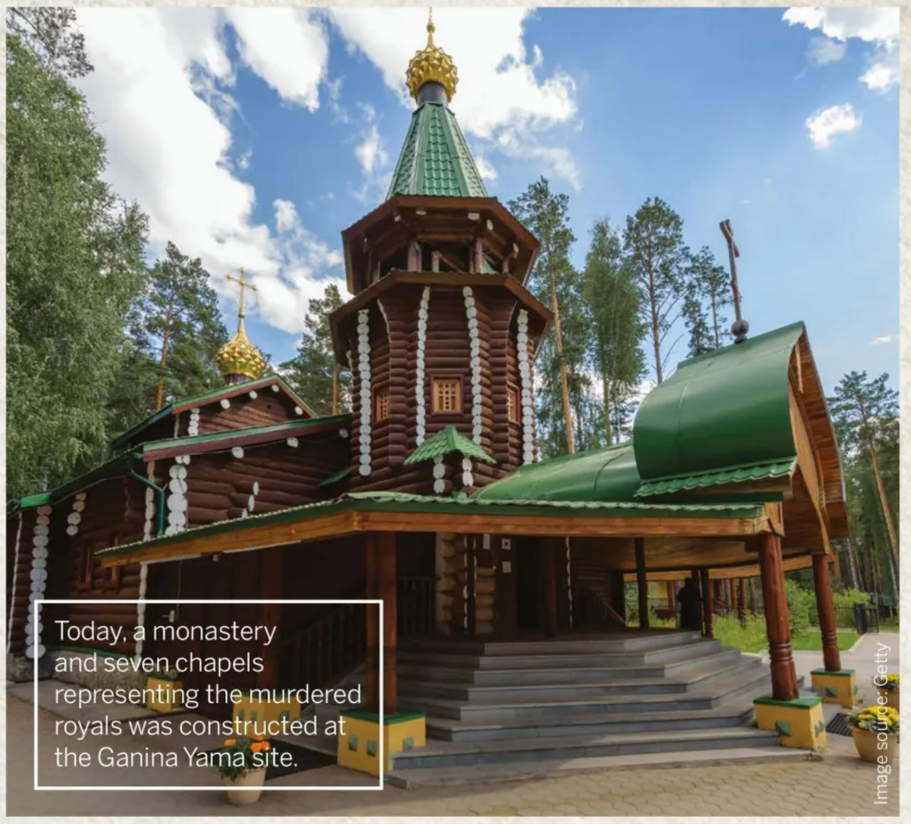
EXECUTED BY THE BOLSHEVIKS IN JULY 1918, THE LAST TSAR OF RUSSIA AND HIS FAMILY LAY BURIED IN A NONDESCRIPT MEADOW FOR DECADES

Around 12 miles north of Yekaterinberg, Russia's fourth-largest city, a place which sits on the liminal borderlands between Europe and Asia, is one of the most infamous sites in 20th-century history: the dump site of 11 persons murdered in cold blood for political motives. A secluded spot among pines and silver birches, for almost 60 years this was an unknown crime scene, a totalitarian state's dirty little secret. For in this muddy meadow lay the last tsar of Russia, his wife, children and a small retinue of servants, including their physician. Executed by firing squad in the early hours of 17 July 1918 at Ipatiev House, codenamed 'the House of Special Purpose', the murder and body disposal was carried out by regional members of the Cheka, or secret service, led by Yakov Yurovsky.

Below: Ipatiev House in 1918. The House of Special Purpose, as it was codenamed, appeared heavily guarded and fortified

It was the weak provisional government, led by Alexander Kerensky, who sent the abdicated tsar first to Siberia, for his protection as much as a symbolic rebuke. But as the Bolsheviks came to power during the early days of the Russian Civil War, moves began to be made against Tsar Nicholas and the aristocracy. Transported from relative comfort in Tobolsk to harsher conditions at Yekaterinberg, the family was placed at Ipatiev House on the outskirts of the city. The windows were painted black and the perimeter doubly fortified with large walls. Bolshevik soldiers were stationed all over the house. One even guarded the toilet.

The execution in the cellar of Ipatiev House set an unfortunate standard of debasement. Each soldier had been assigned a target. When Yurovsky fired point blank at



Today, a monastery and seven chapels representing the murdered royals was constructed at the Ganina Yama site.

Image source: Getty

The burial site at Porosyonkov Log (Piglet's Ravine), 1992, north of Yekaterinberg, marked by a simple Orthodox cross.

Image source: Getty

the tsar, killing him instantly, the other soldiers began firing in less ordered fashion. Bullets ricocheted from the brick walls, zinging and pinging. The tsarina and her daughters had woven diamonds, gems and gold trinkets into their clothing. Even bayonets couldn't penetrate their torsos properly. They were finished off with shots to the head. As gun smoke cleared and pools of blood formed on the floor, the next stage of the operation was carried out, proving equally – and horribly – farcical.

Taken in a truck to a remote, derelict mining facility near the village of Koptyaki, the entire area ring-fenced off and nosey locals ordered to be shot on sight if they did not disperse immediately, the bodies were initially dumped down a mineshaft. Sulphuric acid was used to disfigure faces, benzene used to aid in the burning of corpses and grenades lobbed into the shaft to disrupt the structure and collapse it. Only that's not what happened. The scene became more of a mess. It took 50 hours in total to organise the macabre disposal of the Romanovs. In the end, still in the Koptyaki forest, the Romanovs were buried in a nondescript boggy meadow and covered by railway ties.

Soviet propagandists told the country Nicholas II had been executed, but the family were living abroad. Rumours soon whirled, such as one of the children surviving the ordeal, the daughter, Anastasia. An imposter named Anna Anderson would present herself as the princess for years. In the USSR, any wider talk of the Romanovs was greatly discouraged.

Today a series of chapels cover the ground where Tsar Nicholas and his family were so callously disposed. Bone fragments were initially unearthed in the 1970s, but it wasn't until the early 1990s when the full story came to be known. In 2007 Alexei Romanov, Nicholas' heir, and his sister, Maria, were uncovered a mere 60 metres (196 feet) away from the others. The bones of the Romanovs were reinterred at the Peter and Paul Cathedral in St Petersburg, where their ancestors resided.

CHURCH-ON-THE-BLOOD

The infamous Ipatiev House stood until 1977, when the government ordered it to be demolished

A villa built in the late 1880s, at the time of the October Revolution it was owned by mining engineer Nikolai Ipatiev. The notorious house where the Romanov family and their small entourage spent 78 days before their assassination in its cellar no longer stands. On 16 September 1977 the Politburo ordered its demolition, as if erasing the building would erase memories of the event which took place there in the summer of 1918.

In 1990, the state handed over the remains of the site to the Russian Orthodox Church. In 2000 the church canonised Tsar Nicholas II and his family as passion-bearers, which led to the commissioning and eventual building of the traditional Byzantine-influenced Church-on-the-Blood in Honour of All Saints Resplendent in the Russian Land. In 2003 the complex, comprising of two churches, a belfry and a memorial museum, was officially consecrated and became a popular tourist attraction and wedding venue. The lower church has an icon-adorned memorial crypt on the exact site of the execution.

International and national interest in the fate of the Romanovs has made the bustling city of Yekaterinburg, known as Sverdlovsk from 1924 to 1991, a tourist attraction, as well as a site of veneration for the slain.

Image source: Vladimir Udilov

Top, right: The Church-on-the-Blood memorialises the Romanov family's execution on the site in 1918

Above: The cellar room where the tsar, his family, servants and physician were gathered and shot

John F Kennedy and his wife Jackie in the presidential limousine, minutes before Lee Harvey Oswald fired his fatal shots

Image source: Getty

ASSASSINATION OF JFK

THE US PRESIDENT WAS KILLED IN A MOTORCADE IN DALLAS, TEXAS, AND THE ASSASSINATION SITE IS NOW A MAJOR TOURIST DESTINATION

On 22 November 1963, US President John F Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline, were riding in a motorcade in Dallas with the Texas Governor John Connally and his wife, Nellie. As they travelled through the city's Dealey Plaza, shots rang out. A detour followed to Parkland Memorial Hospital; Connally was seriously injured but survived, but 30 minutes after arriving at the hospital, the president was declared dead.

Kennedy's violent death at the hands – most, although not all, believe – of Lee Harvey Oswald has become mythologised, endlessly debated and is the subject of numerous books and films. As the subject of fiction, including Norman Mailer's *Oswald's Tale* and Don DeLillo's *Libra*, it has been rewritten or reinterpreted, becoming part of American culture. It's a key part of 20th-century American history, particularly as it was filmed by onlookers. 32 photographers were present, and there were also amateur movie makers there; the most famous film recorded there that day was by a garment manufacturer and amateur cameraman named Abraham Zapruder, whose images of the assassination have since been given to the National Archives.

Below: JFK served as President of the United States from 1961 until his death in 1963 at the age of 46

Today, tourists continue to flock to this Texan city to find out more about the events of 22 November 1963, and although times have changed, and Dallas certainly hasn't become a relic of the 1960s, there is plenty to see and do here to learn more about the assassination and its impact on American culture.

Dealey Plaza, a Dallas city park, has since the assassination been named a National Historic Landmark in recognition of its place in American history, with the structures and buildings that were witness locations protected and preserved. The key preserved building is the former Texas School Book Depository, from whose sixth-

Insert image source: Cecil Stoughton, White House

Image source: Getty

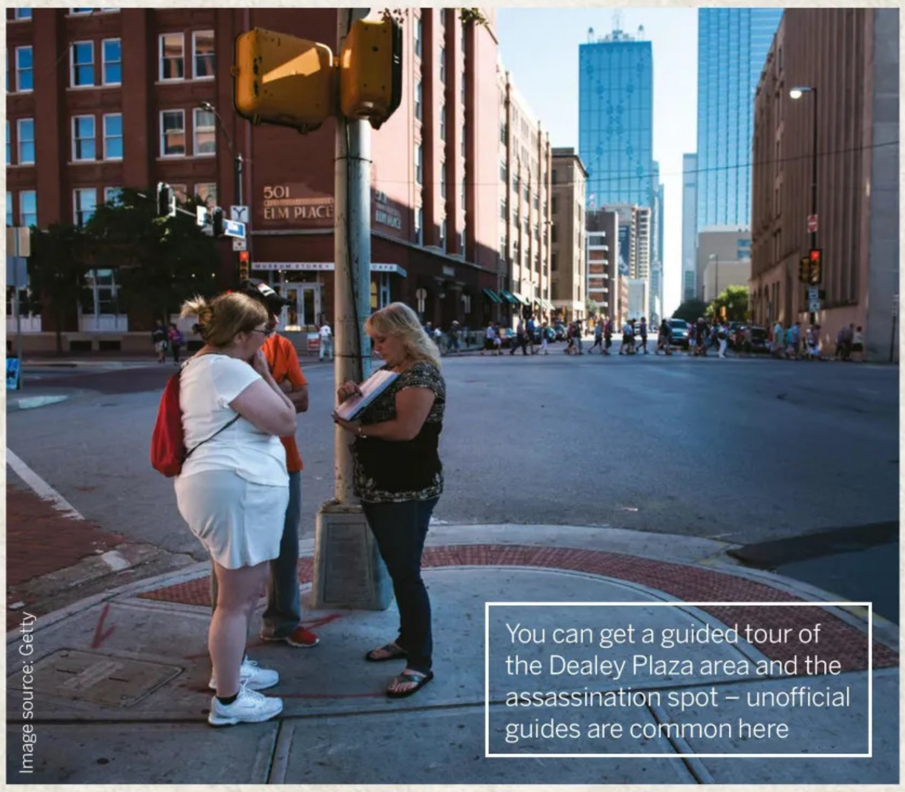


Image source: Getty

You can get a guided tour of the Dealey Plaza area and the assassination spot – unofficial guides are common here

floor window Lee Harvey Oswald watched the presidential motorcade and shot JFK three times. The building now houses the Sixth Floor Museum.

In Dealey Plaza, on the north side of Main Street, is a bronze marker on red granite depicting Kennedy's visit to Dallas, while between Main Street and Commerce Street is the Kennedy Memorial and Plaza; the memorial is hard to miss, being a nine-metre-high monument or cenotaph in a brutalist style. In the middle of it is Kennedy's name, engraved in gold on black granite. The memorial was constructed in 1969, and its plaza includes benches where you can sit and look up at the imposing structure.

You can see the exact spot where Kennedy was shot: the assassination site, on Elm Street between North Houston Street and the Triple Underpass, features a white 'x' marked on the road. Do be careful if you want to have your photograph taken next to it, though, given its location.

Finally, you may have heard mention of the 'grassy knoll' in relation to the assassination; this is a small hill on the northwest side of the plaza, and next to the Texas School Book Depository building. Several witnesses to the assassination were based here or nearby, but at the time of the killing some secret service agents believed the fatal shots had actually been fired from here, and their comments were repeated on live television by news anchor Walter Cronkite, subsequently making this small slope internationally famous.

Kennedy's assassination has been viewed as the death of America's innocence. Although other presidents before him had been killed, his was a truly modern affair, filmed and photographed, creating a myth that endures today. Therefore, tourists come not only to look at where he died, but also to learn about American culture of the time and the impact of his death on the country. There is little ghoulishness about how Dallas has preserved buildings and places, but rather a recognition of their importance in the American psyche.

THE SIXTH FLOOR MUSEUM

Where an assassin once hid is now an important Dallas museum

Now known as the Dallas County Administration Building, the former Texas School Book Depository occupies a key place in American history. The sixth floor, from where JFK was killed, is now the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza. It features both permanent and special exhibitions covering aspects of Kennedy's life and presidency, but it also aims to look at the legacy of JFK and his place within the history and culture of 1960s America.

There is also a reading room and library, and the museum holds an online collection relating to the assassination, including oral history interviews with those who were at Dealey Plaza watching the presidential motorcade.

The museum has – appropriately, given the building's former function – a bookstore, specialising in items relating to Kennedy, but also books about US presidents and American history. There is also a museum shop and café, although these are not in the original building but straight across the road at the corner of Houston and Elm Streets.

The Sixth Floor Museum is open seven days a week, although do check the website for exact times. Although it is only free to under fives, you can get discounts on admission by using a Dallas CityPass.

Image source: Michael Barera

Insert: The Sixth Floor Museum is housed in a building that will always be associated with the president's assassination

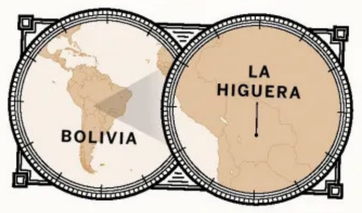
Top, right: Citizens across the country read the news of Kennedy's death in the papers

Top, left: The 'grassy knoll' at Dealey Plaza was made famous by US news anchor Walter Kronkite when he mentioned it as being the location of the assassin

Image source: Alamy

The laundry in Vallegrande where Guevara's corpse was displayed has become a pilgrimage site

LOCATION



TIME ZONE

UTC-4

CURRENCY

Bolivian boliviano

TOP TIP

To get the most out of your visit, why not read Guevara's book, *Guerrilla Warfare*, before you go?

Image source: Alamy

THE CHE GUEVARA TRAIL

CHE GUEVARA'S FINAL JOURNEY HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A SOCIALIST PILGRIMAGE, IN A LAND ONCE HOSTILE TO HIS CAUSE

In 1966, Che Guevara embarked upon his last, ill-fated adventure – a failed revolution in Bolivia that would ultimately lead to his execution. Having previously played a leading role in the Cuban Communist Revolution, Guevara had fallen out with Castro and left for the Congo, where he failed to inspire a socialist rebellion.

Dejected, he turned his attention to Bolivia, a country with vast natural resources, rife with poverty and underdevelopment, seemingly ripe for revolution. With a long history of resistance to colonial power, and bordering five countries, it seemed like the perfect launchpad for Guevara's international revolution. His idea was to set up a guerrilla training camp in the Andes, recruiting Bolivian peasants and drawing fighters from abroad. He initially met with some success, but failed to endear himself to the local farmers and communists, and became cut off from Cuba. Before long, the US sent a group of Green Berets to hunt him down.

Above: The most famous image of the revolutionary leader

Today, eager to better understand the mentality of Guevara, the ultimate socialist warrior, visitors follow in the footsteps of his last great adventure on the Che Guevara Trail. Breathing new life into the story of Guevara's bizarre final expedition, the trail starts at La Paz, where, disguised as a Uruguayan businessman, he stayed in room 504 at the Hotel Copacabana. Today, guests can ask to see the room. The journey continues from here to the Bolivian capital of Santa Cruz, a perfect stocking-up point for guerrilla and modern traveller alike, before heading into the south-eastern provinces of Santa Cruz and Chuquisaca, where the bulk of the trail is set.

In this sparsely populated region, marked by jungle overgrowth and mountainous terrain, Guevara set up a training camp by the Ñancahuazú River. While this precarious landscape isolated the guerrillas, treading and scrambling along its untamed mud paths, it is easy to see how Guevara managed to evade capture for as long as

Insert image source: Alberto Korda

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Alamy

Follow in the signposted footsteps of the revolutionary leader

he did, even taking the village of Samaipata with just 25 men, before succumbing to betrayal, disease, hunger and battle. Snaking south-west, the trail traces Guevara's last steps, culminating in his capture at the hands of American-trained anti-guerilla forces. Hikers can embark on a two-hour trek to the spot where he was caught, immortalised by a pebble star.

The next day, when faced with his executioner at La Higuera, Guevara said: "Shoot, you are only going to kill a man." The classroom where the Argentinian revolutionary was killed is adorned with pictures, messages and flags left by pilgrims, a child's chair over the spot where he died.

The trail ends at Vallegrande, where Guevara's body was airlifted, hauled onto a sink, and photographed in the laundry at Señor de Malta Hospital – today dressed in graffiti, celebrating his slogan: "Until victory, always." Still a functioning hospital, it can be visited with a guide. Six tours run per day, taking visitors to the morgue where a doctor cut off Guevara's hands for fingerprint identification. The locals, meanwhile, light candles to 'Saint Ernesto' Guevara, believed to have healing powers.

Though Guevara's revolution failed, Bolivia is today ruled by an anti-imperialist socialist government, and his unmarked grave in Vallegrande has given way to the Centro Cultural Ernesto Che Guevara. Here, a mausoleum celebrates his life – with photos of his childhood, formative years and revolutionary highs alongside Fidel Castro – and even commemorates the 37 who fell alongside him.

Meanwhile, a reflective end to the trail is found at the neighbouring museum, which explores the Bolivian expedition through first-hand accounts and photos, best summarised by Guevara himself: "In a revolution, you triumph or you die."

THE CHE GUEVARA TRAIL

Beyond its unremarkable villages, the Che Guevara Trail forms a fascinating existential exploration among the Andean wilderness

01 LA PAZ
Ever a guerrilla, Che flew into La Paz under the radar – disguised as a Uruguayan businessman called Adolfo Mena González – before linking up with Cuban and Bolivian rebels.

02 SANTA CRUZ
After arriving in La Paz, Guevara travelled to Santa Cruz, where he ditched his disguise and transformed himself back into the Che that had made him famous the world over – the ultimate guerrilla warrior.

03 LAGUNILLAS
Guevara set up his headquarters on a ranch north of Lagunillas, by the Ñancahuazú River. Arriving with 13 men, mostly Cubans, he planned to recruit and train Bolivian peasants here before setting off a socialist revolution across Latin America.

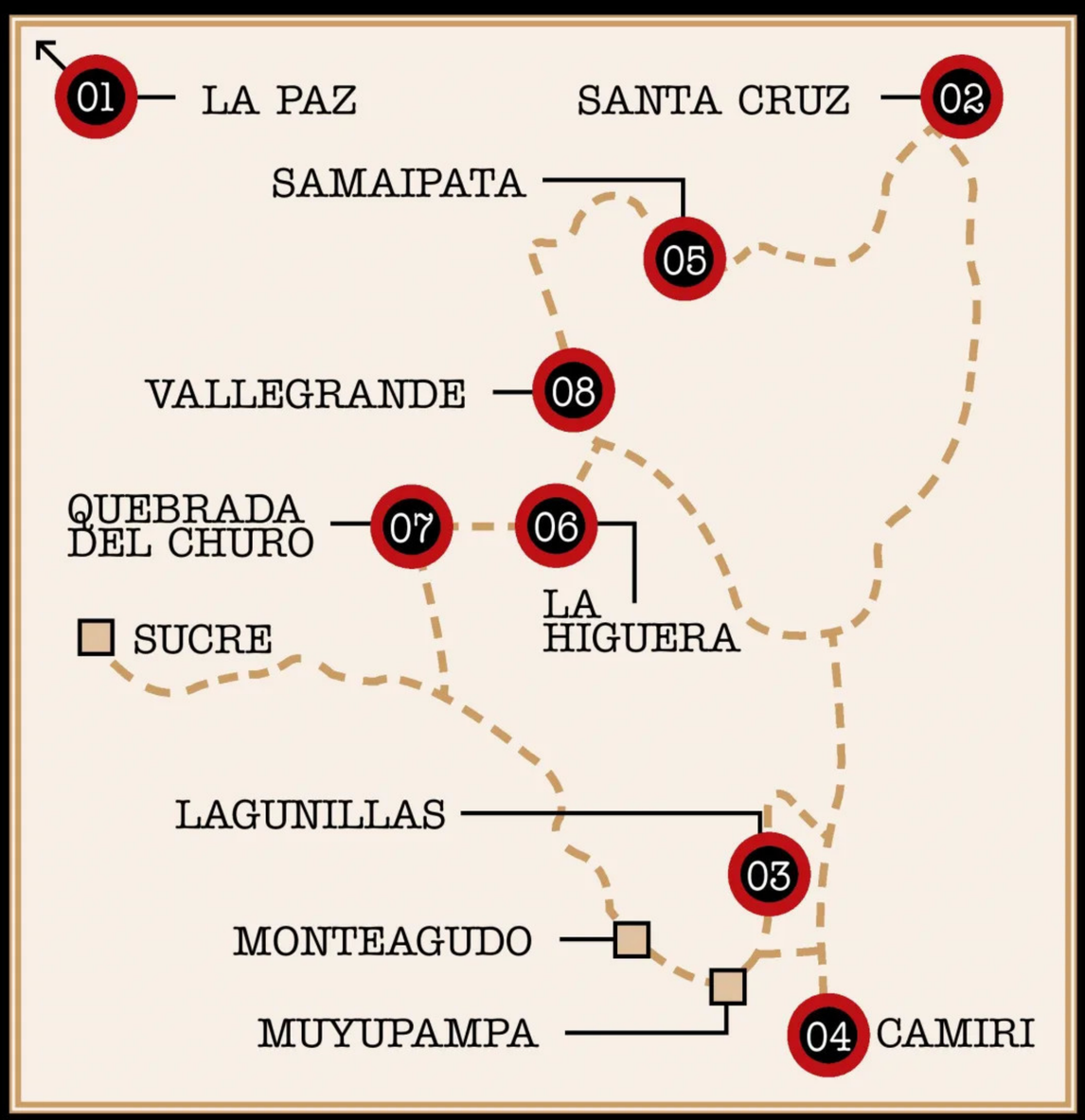
04 CAMIRI
Just south of Guevara's base was Camiri, an oil production hub where two of the rebels were caught trying to sell weapons, blowing the lid on the operation. While Guevara successfully ambushed attacking Bolivians, he had to move on.

05 SAMAIPATA
After splitting his forces into two, Guevara scored one of his only major victories at the village of Samaipata, which he captured with just 25 men. However, before long, his troops would begin to succumb to disease, bullets and hunger.

06 LA HIGUERA
By the time Guevara retreated to La Higuera, with just 16 fighters, his second contingent had already surrendered. While La Higuera is today dressed in Guevara iconography, it was the site of Guevara's eventual execution.

07 QUEBRADA DEL CHURO
After successive defeats, Che Guevara hid with his last 10 guerrillas in a clearing near Quebrada del Churo. Later, he lost six more men, before being wounded himself and, unable to fight any longer, he surrendered.

08 VALLEGRANDE
After his execution, Guevara's body was flown to Vallegrande and hauled onto a sink in the laundry at Señor de Malta Hospital and photographed. The images of his cleaned-up corpse made a martyr of the rebel, who, in death, appeared rather Christ-like.



The Dakota building in the Upper West Side is a New York landmark

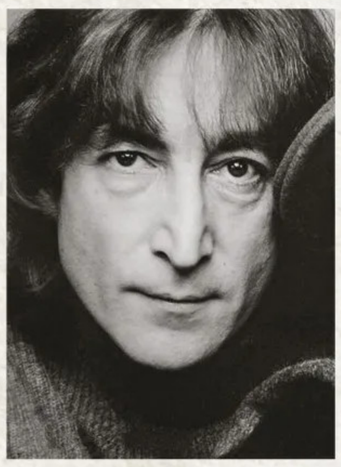
Page source: Andrevruas

THE MURDER OF JOHN LENNON

THE DAKOTA BUILDING IN MANHATTAN IS WHERE BEATLES LEGEND JOHN LENNON WAS GUNNED DOWN BY DAVID MARK CHAPMAN IN 1980

The Dakota building at West 72nd Street is one of the most exclusive addresses on the island of Manhattan. It always has been. Commissioned by Edward Clark, the co-founder of the Singer sewing machine company, the lawyer and property developer employed renowned architect Henry Janeway Hardenbergh to design the fashionable apartment dwelling for NYC's upper classes. Clark's grand scheme was to transform the entire Upper West Side, at the time largely empty, into the city's elite enclave. Apartment-living in this period was frowned upon by rich folk, so the Dakota had to be grand enough to draw interest. The multi-roomed luxury apartments – 65 in total and all unique – were sold before the Gothic-inspired building was completed in 1884.

The Dakota, legend has it, earned its name because in the era of its construction, the Upper West Side was so far from the epicentre of New York life, it might as well have been in the black hills of Dakota. On a cold December night, at the entrance on West 72nd Street, a man stood lurking. Mark David Chapman was a die-hard Beatles fan, and a troubled individual. For a while now he'd been consumingly obsessed with the pop group's most controversial member, John Lennon, and began to plot against him. Because of Chapman the Dakota, formerly just another upscale residence for celebrities and the rich, was transformed into a site of enduring infamy, forever tainted by tragedy. It will never escape these associations.



Above: John Lennon's assassination shocked the world, but his music – and his message – lives on to this day

The senseless assassination of John Lennon on 8 December 1980 shocked the world. Sporting events and television broadcasts were interrupted with special news bulletins. It was common knowledge the musician was open to fans approaching him. Autograph hunters would congregate outside the Dakota, hoping to catch a glimpse of the star. He was kind enough to often sign autographs

Insert image source: Jack Mitchell

Image source: Getty

Image source: Getty

Image source: Getty

and pose for photos. Yet Lennon's good-natured openness and the lack of security – because why would anybody want to harm him – allowed a killer right into his midst. What's remarkable is Chapman had met Lennon a few hours before he pulled the gun on his former hero and took his life. He'd signed a copy of the *Double Fantasy* LP and been so nice, Chapman momentarily dithered. "Is that all?" Lennon asked. While he meant "Is there anything else you'd like me to sign?" The former Beatles man's question echoes with a cruel irony. Chapman had the gun on him at this time, but the encounter – so close and personal – put him off doing it there and then.

Chapman did not intend to merely harm Lennon or produce a botched job. He wholly intended to murder him and make sure this outcome transpired. To do this he purchased hollow-point bullets, fired from a Charter Arms snub-nosed .38 Special. Hollow-point bullets are used for their accuracy and the devastation they cause on impact. They explode. When hitting and entering soft tissue and organs, the damage is irreparable. As Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono reappeared at the Dakota, Chapman made eye contact with his target, waited a moment, then struck without a word. He shot five times, the rock idol struck twice in the lower back and twice in the left shoulder area. One shot missed entirely.

John Lennon was later pronounced dead at Roosevelt Hospital, surgeons unable to save him. Chapman did not flee the crime scene, he simply stood and read his copy of *Catcher in the Rye* and went with the police quietly. News reports left the world reeling and feeling robbed of a man whose music defined an era – an emotion which has not diminished in time.

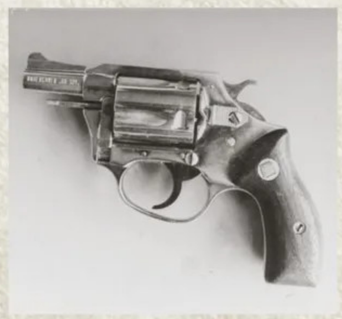
Above: Beatles and Lennon fans left flowers at the entrance to the Dakota, where their music hero was shot

Top, right: Within an hour of the news breaking, Beatles fans congregated at the entrance to the Dakota

Top, left: Not just an attraction for dark tourists, but also for fans of music and The Beatles

Right: A memorial stone donated by the city of Naples in honour of Lennon in Central Park

Below: The Charter Arms snub-nosed .38 Special used by Mark David Chapman to gun down John Lennon



STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER

Dedicated to Lennon on what would have been his 45th birthday, Central Park's memorial is a stone's throw from the Dakota

In 1981, a patch in New York's major green space was formerly dubbed Strawberry Fields in the late musician's honour, named so after one of The Beatles' most famous tracks. It was then decided by Central Park authorities this area would be completely redesigned. Ono put the kibosh on a statue, preferring something more thoughtful and interesting: a living memorial. On what would have been John Lennon's 45th birthday, 9 October 1985, a ceremony was held in Central Park, led by his widow Yoko Ono, to formerly open the newly renovated Strawberry Fields.

Strawberry Fields, a 2.5-acre spot, was designed by landscape architect Bruce Kelly, working with Ono, to create a space where people could contemplate life and even meditate. Sitting right across, as it does, from the Dakota, Strawberry Fields offers fans something more tranquil and uplifting than the sadness associated with the Dakota building.

The black-and-white Portuguese pavement-style mosaic memorial stone was donated by the city of Naples and reads 'Imagine', another reference to one of Lennon's songs, arguably his most well-known of all. John Lennon died an unnecessarily violent death at the hands of a maniac, but his 1960s counter-culture-influenced values inspire fans to this day.

Image source: Susan M. Dunn

Insert image source: Getty

INFAMOUS SLAUGHTERS

EXPLORE THE PLACES WHERE THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE CAME TO A SUDDEN AND VIOLENT DEATH

GRIGORI RASPUTIN

Uncover the brutal death of the notorious and divisive Russian

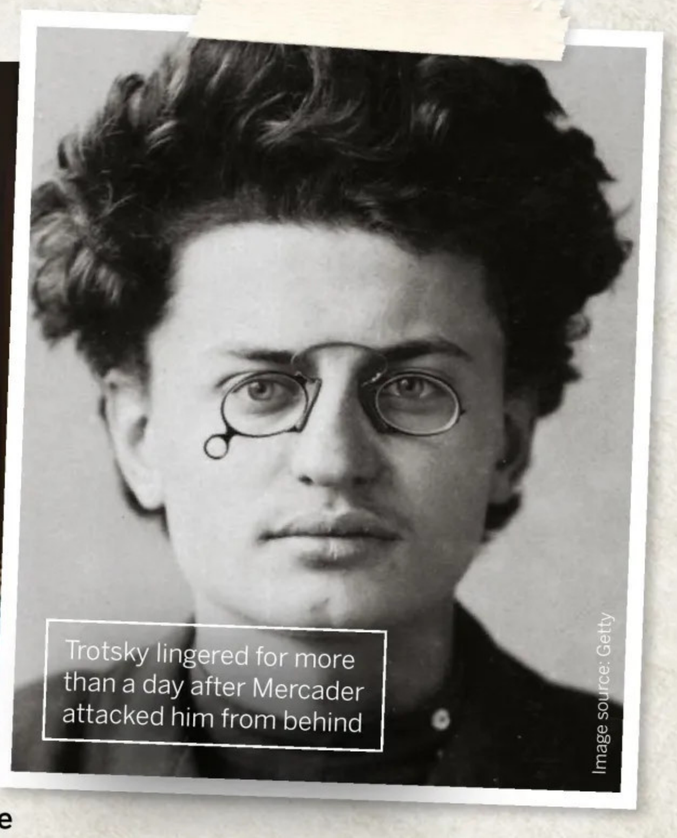
Location: St Petersburg, Russia
Time zone: UTC+3 **Currency:** Russian ruble

According to the admittedly unreliable account of the assassin who killed him, self-proclaimed mystic and royal adviser Rasputin survived two doses of poison and two gunshot wounds before finally succumbing to a shot to the head. The site of the rather drawn-out murder was the palatial home of his killer, Prince Felix Yusupov. Confiscated during the Russian Revolution, it is now administered by the Department for Education and open for guided tours. While many are wowed by the luxurious family rooms, the basement in which divisive Rasputin met his grisly end contains an exhibition about the murder and several waxwork recreations of the notorious crime.

Rasputin's body was dumped into the Malaya Nevka River, but found two days later

Image source: Karl Bulla

Image source: Alamy



Trotsky lingered for more than a day after Mercader attacked him from behind

Image source: Getty

LEON TROTSKY

Discover how Stalin's vengeance reached around the globe

Location: Mexico City, Mexico
Time zone: UTC-6 **Currency:** Mexican peso

The other side of the world was not quite far enough for exiled Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky to escape from his comrade-turned-rival Joseph Stalin. Trotsky eventually settled in a small house in Mexico City, but Spanish Stalinist Ramón Mercader gained access and killed Trotsky with a blow to the head from an ice axe. Now a museum, the house has been left as it was when Trotsky lived and died there.

Visitors can see the desk where Trotsky was sat when the fatal blow was struck and bullet holes in the wall from a previous assassination attempt. The revolutionary's ashes are buried in the garden under a stone marker.

Image source: Getty

Image source: Pixabay

THOMAS BECKET

Find out how assassination created a new pilgrimage site

Location: Canterbury, UK
Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling

"Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" King Henry II came to rue his words when his exasperated exclamation was interpreted by four knights as an order. They rode to Canterbury and chopped down the troublesome clergyman inside the city's cathedral. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury and former friend of the king, was dead. Canterbury quickly became a site of pilgrimage for those who wanted to venerate the archbishop-turned-saint. Although the martyr's tomb and shrine were removed during the Reformation, pilgrims and visitors still come to see the dramatic sculpture marking where he was killed and the candle where the shrine used to be.

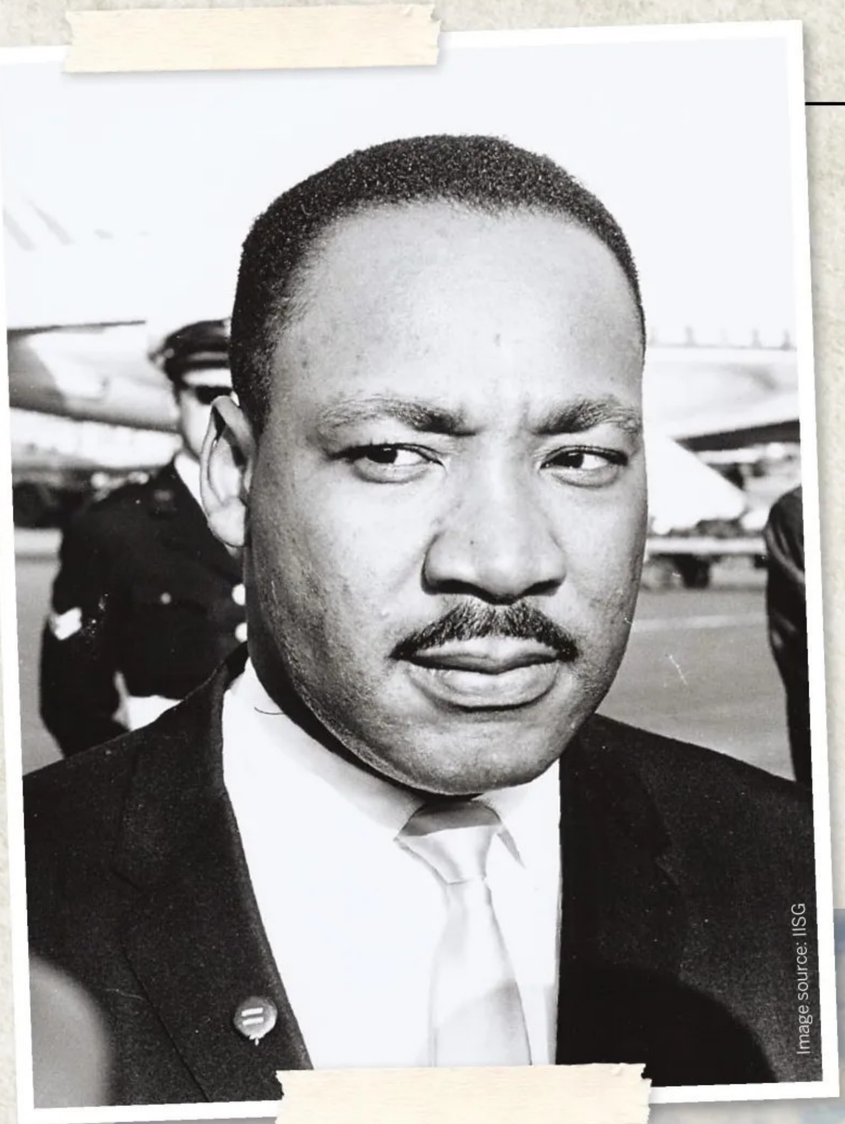


Image source: IISG

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

See where an icon of nonviolent protest suffered a violent death

Location: Memphis, USA
Time zone: UTC-6 **Currency:** US dollar

The Lorraine Motel in Memphis was familiar ground for Martin Luther King Jr – the civil rights leader had stayed there several times. However, the open balcony made him an easy target for escaped prisoner James Earl Ray, who used a rifle from a boarding house across the road.

Room 306 was never used by guests again, and the motel was converted into the National Civil Rights Museum in 1991. King's last bedroom is quiet and understated; exhibits detailing the assassination are located in the building and room from where Ray fired his fatal bullet.

Image source: DavGreg

Image source: Getty

YITZHAK RABIN

Explore the public square where a statesman was gunned down

Location: Tel Aviv, Israel
Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Israeli shekel

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was, ironically, leaving a peace rally when nationalist Yigal Amir fired three bullets at him using a semi-automatic pistol. Rabin was hit twice and died within an hour.

The site of the rally, Kings of Israel Square, was swiftly renamed Rabin Square in honour of the deceased Prime Minister and Nobel Prize winner. A memorial is located at the precise spot where Rabin was gunned down on the City Hall steps as he moved towards the open door of his car, while graffiti drawn by young Israelis who flocked to the square to publicly mourn in the days after the assassination has been preserved.

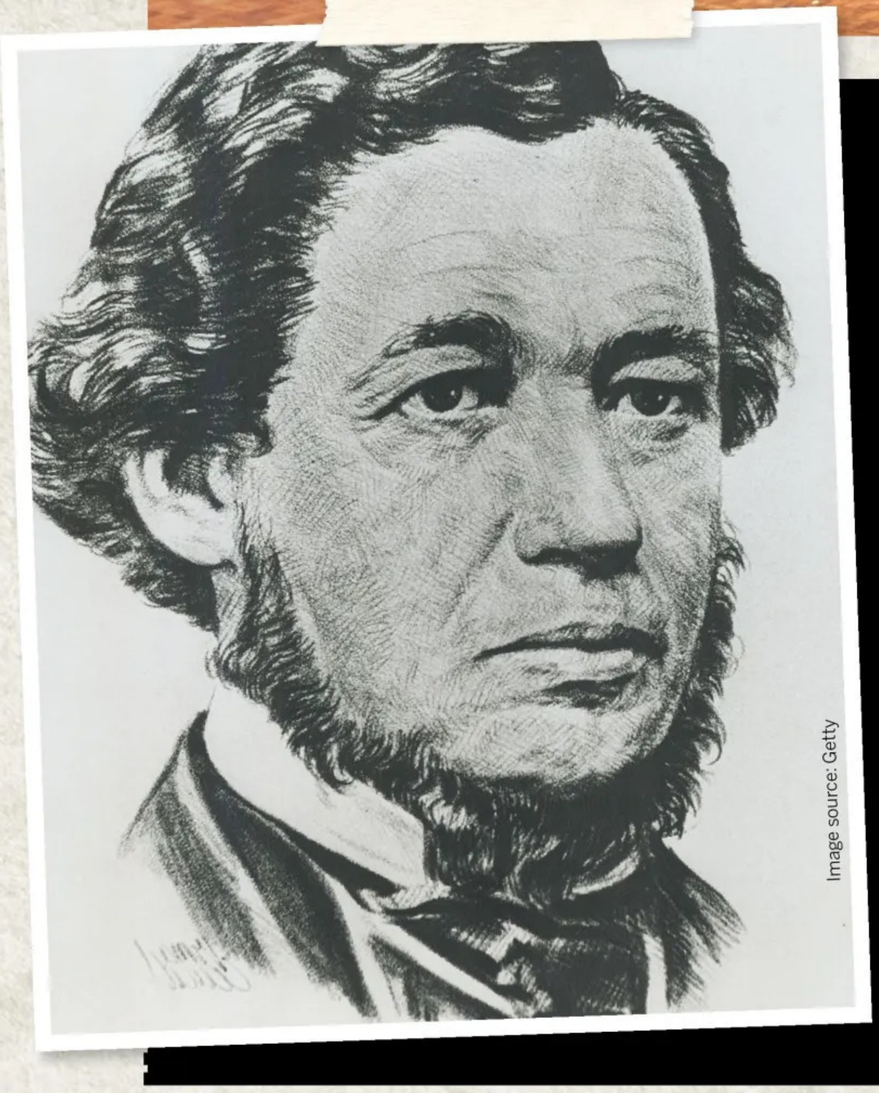


Image source: Getty

THOMAS D'ARCY MCGEE

Visit the site of Canada's most prominent political killing

Location: Sparks Street, Ottawa, Canada
Time zone: UTC-5
Currency: Canadian dollar

In the early hours of 7 April 1868, Thomas D'Arcy McGee – one of the foremost politicians in the newly created Confederation of Canada – left a debate in Parliament and walked the short distance to his boarding house. Hiding inside was a concealed assassin who fired one shot from point-blank range, killing McGee instantly.

There is now no trace of Mrs Trotter's Boarding House. Sparks Street has transformed into a pedestrianised shopping and government district, but a memorial plaque detailing the killing can be seen nearby, as can the Thomas D'Arcy McGee Building, the home to government offices and the Royal Bank of Canada.

Rabin Square still hosts rallies, parades and events, but is a peaceful open space when no event is taking place

Image source: Ron Henzel

MALCOLM X

Examine the death and legacy of a civil rights legend

Location: New York, USA
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** US dollar

Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom served as a meeting place for Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity after his public split with the Nation of Islam; it was in the middle of one such meeting that three Nation assassins sprung from the crowd of 400 and unloaded a shotgun and two handguns into their former comrade. The ballroom quickly fell into disrepair after the infamous crime and was nearly demolished to make way for a medical school. However, a campaign supported by Malcolm X's widow saw two-thirds of the building's facade and part of the ballroom preserved and converted into a museum honouring the civil rights leader.

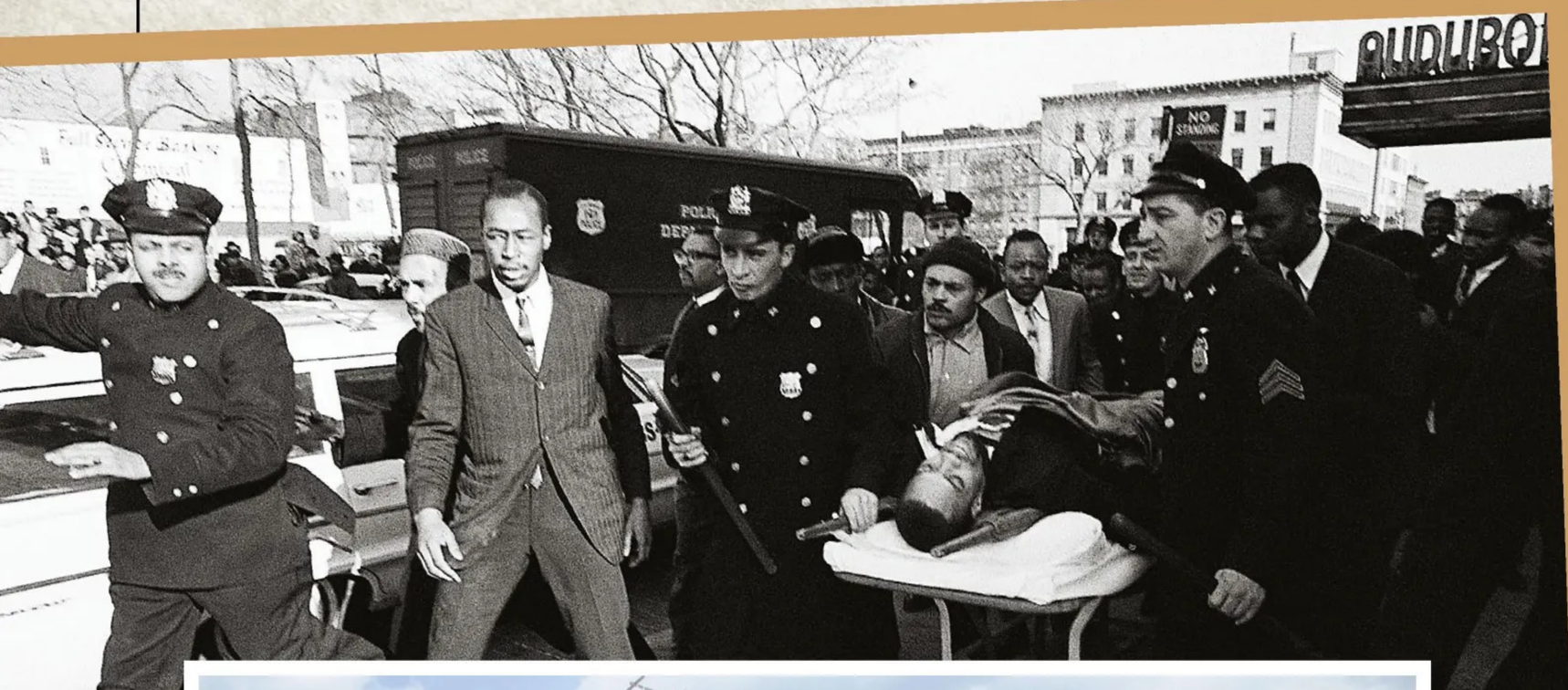


Image source: Getty

Image source: Thinkstock

FRANZ FERDINAND

Visit the site of the assassination that began a great war

Location: Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Bosnia and Herzegovina convertible mark

On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was shot dead by Gavrilo Princip. This assassination prompted a war that consumed the world. Today the site of the shooting is one of the most historically significant locations on the planet. The bridge itself is one of the oldest preserved bridges in Sarajevo, and stretches across the Miljacka river on four arches. However, it is the bridge's historical importance that draws travellers from across the globe.

At one point there was a monument to the archduke placed nearby, but this has since been torn down, and now an unassuming plaque at the spot where Princip fired explains the deadly events that occurred on the bridge. For anyone with a strong interest in 20th-century history, this bridge is simply a must-see. It is the perfect place to find quiet reflection on the shot that shook the foundations of the world.

GANDHI

See where the peaceful man spent his final days

Location: New Delhi, India
Time zone: UTC+5.30 **Currency:** Indian rupee

Birla House, now Gandhi Smriti, originally served as the business house of the Indian tycoons, the Birla family. Mahatma Gandhi was a friend and frequent visitor to the family, and it was here during his final stay from 9 September 1947 to 30 January 1948 that the man who led India to independence was assassinated.

Today the site has been turned into a museum in Gandhi's memory, housing a cornucopia of treasures from Gandhi's last days including photographs, paintings and personal belongings. The room where the freedom fighter stayed has been lovingly preserved, and visitors can also walk to view the exact spot where Gandhi was shot, now marked by the unassuming but sobering Martyr's Column.

Image source: Gaurav Vaidya

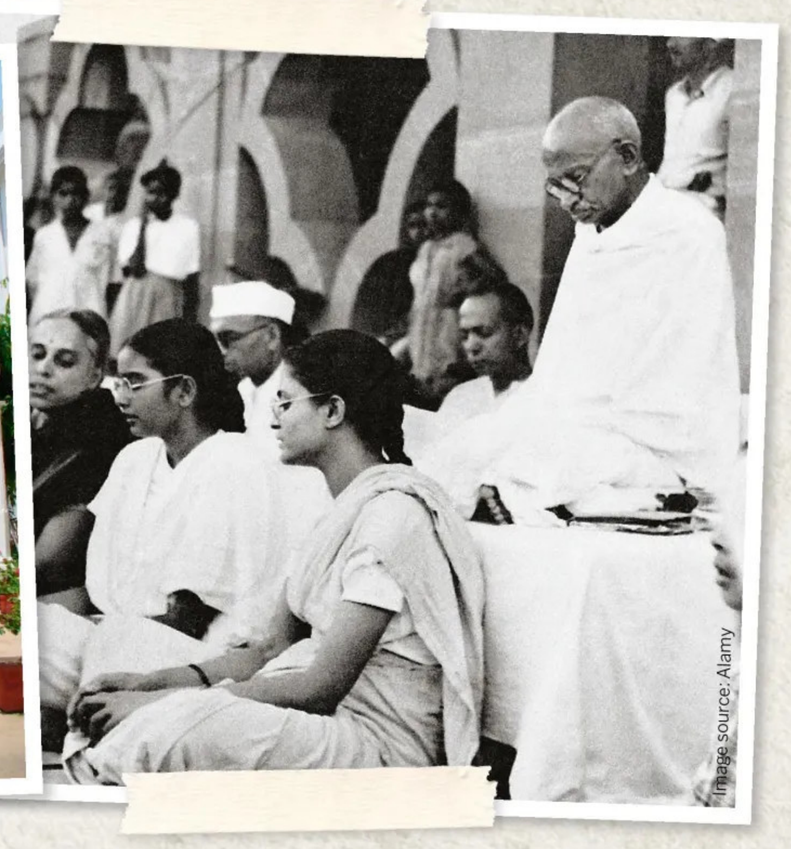


Image source: Alamy

Image source: Pixabay

Although much has been dismantled, the palace complex once included 500 buildings

Image source: Getty

EMPRESS MYEONGSEONG

Uncover a bloody plot at the heart of the Korean court

Location: Seoul, South Korea
Time zone: UTC+9 **Currency:** South Korean won

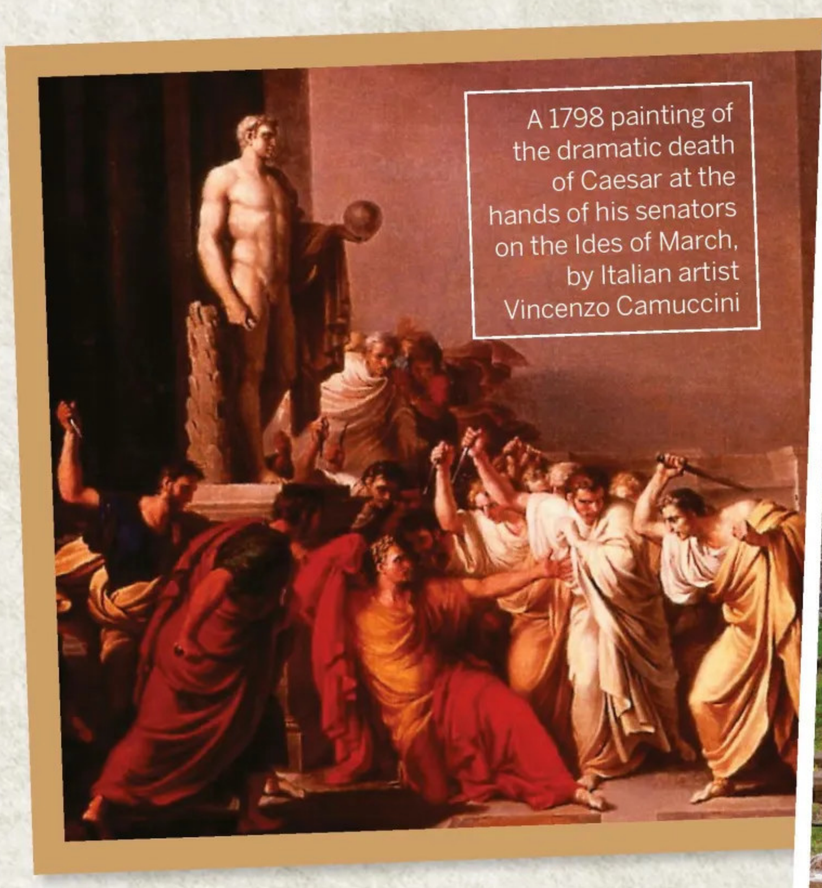
The political machinations of Empress Myeongseong came to a dramatic and violent conclusion in October 1895 when a group of Japanese warriors infiltrated the inner sanctum of the Korean royal palace. They found the queen, killed her and burned and buried the body. One of the greatest obstacles to Japanese expansion in Korea had been brutally removed. Gyeongbokgung Palace is now being rebuilt as a tourist destination after much of it was destroyed during Japanese occupation. Among the restored buildings is the site of Korea's infamous assassination, Okhoru Pavilion in the royal residence that the empress shared with King Gojong.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

See where a play had a deadly ending for one US president

Location: Washington, DC, USA
Time zone: UTC+5 **Currency:** US dollar

In the 1860s, what was originally a house of worship was transformed into a theatre by John T Ford. Although the original was destroyed by a fire, the rebuilt theatre was declared a "magnificent new thespian temple". On 14 April 1865, five days after the Confederate surrender, President Lincoln attended the theatre, but his trip was to end in disaster. Actor and staunch Confederate John Wilkes Booth stepped into the box and shot Lincoln at point-blank range. The building was not used as a theatre again until 1968. Although it operates as a theatre today, the historical significance of the building has been preserved in the museum that sits beneath it. Here, a multitude of items related to the assassination can be viewed – including the pistol used by Booth and Booth's diary, as well as Lincoln's personal items.



A 1798 painting of the dramatic death of Caesar at the hands of his senators on the Ides of March, by Italian artist Vincenzo Camuccini

Image source: Getty

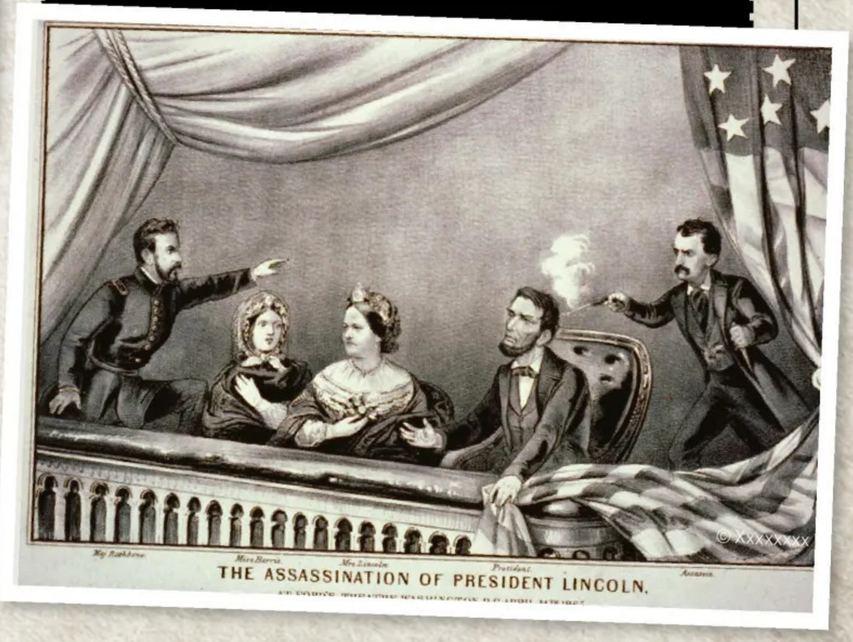
CAESAR

Visit the site of Caesar's betrayal and death

Location: Rome, Italy
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Built by Pompey the Great in an effort to drum up political support, the Theatre of Pompey was Rome's first permanent theatre. Crafted from concrete and stone, the theatre served as an early prototype for the iconic Roman theatres built across the empire. The enormous stage, which was 100-metres wide, was just the tip of the opulence of the building, which also housed a temple and lavish gardens, all beautifully decorated with statues and embellishments.

Opposite the garden during Caesar's lifetime there was a curia, famous as the site of his betrayal and assassination. Today not much remains of the groundbreaking theatre, but the intact sections can still be found at the Palazzo della Cancelleria, and the imprint of the opulence that once stood there can be traced across the site.



GENOCIDE

DISCOVER THE REMEMBRANCE SITES OF SOME OF THE WORLD'S BLOODIEST AND MOST BRUTAL MASS EXECUTIONS

50 AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU, POLAND
No other word conjures images of political terror and outright evil as Auschwitz...

56 PERM-36, RUSSIA
Discover the last-standing gulag, representing Soviet repression

60 KILLING FIELDS, CAMBODIA
Visit the site of one of the worst mass killings of the 20th century

62 RWANDAN REMEMBRANCE, RWANDA
The victims of the brutal 1994 genocide are memorialised in numerous locations across the now-peaceful African nation

56

62

AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

NO OTHER WORD CONJURES IMAGES OF POLITICAL TERROR AND OUTRIGHT EVIL LIKE 'AUSCHWITZ'. THE NOTORIOUS CONCENTRATION AND DEATH CAMP TODAY EXISTS AS A MEMORIAL MUSEUM

LOCATION

TIME ZONE

UTC +1

CURRENCY

Polish złoty

TOP TIP

Although entry to the grounds is free of charge, pre-booking online is essential to visit.

"Hollywood filmmakers attached to army divisions brought back the most heartbreaking reels of footage featuring piles of dead bodies strewn like garbage. Human beings stared blankly at the camera, teetering unsteadily, looking like skeletons"

Auschwitz sits 31 miles west of Kraków. To the casual outsider it would appear to be little more than a nondescript industrial hub; a type of provincial backwater barely registering as it flashes by in a blur of rural and industrial landscapes on a journey taken by rail or car. Nothing would catch the eye or particularly stand out. It wouldn't have been a destination on a tourist map or somewhere must-see to visit. For much of its history, it was associated with Poland's industry and was a centre for commerce. But between 1940 and 1945, events occurred here that changed all that forever.

When the Allies began liberating Europe from the tyranny of Hitler, the extermination of the Jews became widely known and reported. The horrific cost of racist policy and ideology was laid bare for all to see. Hollywood filmmakers attached to army divisions brought back the most heartbreaking reels of footage featuring piles of dead bodies strewn like garbage. Human beings stared blankly at the camera, teetering unsteadily, looking like skeletons. No matter how extreme and shocking the imagery, it had to be photographed. The black-and-white newsreel images projected in cinemas around the world were a great shock to the public. Over time, Auschwitz became a sort of byword for the cumulative appalling suffering and abject horror experienced by millions. Shoah, Holocaust, Auschwitz: each of these reverberates with a sense of tragedy on

Main: Hungarian Jews arrive at Birkenau in June 1944. More than 430,000 Hungarian Jews were sent to Auschwitz between 2 May and 9 July alone

Image source: Getty

Image source:Getty

Image source: Getty

Image source: Getty

a scale that is barely comprehensible. But of them, only Auschwitz is a place. More importantly, it can be visited. For in this once-anonymous corner of southern Poland, Hitler's Third Reich achieved its grotesque apotheosis: murdering more than 1.1 million men, women and children. Nearly all the victims sent to the gas chambers there were Jews, killed as part of the Final Solution. It is estimated 90 per cent of Auschwitz victims (9 out of 10 of whom were Jews) perished in the Birkenau section of the complex. Soviet POWs, Gypsies and Polish nationals perished here, too, in obscene numbers.

After the camp was liberated by the Red Army in January 1945, swift moves were made by the Polish government to turn Auschwitz into a site of remembrance. The raison d'être of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum is to educate visitors on Nazi crimes and crimes specifically against Europe's Jews. Rather than tear it down in the post-war years, the remnants of the concentration and death camp would serve as a permanent reminder to the world. Auschwitz-Birkenau shows us what happens when we let hatred win and our morality to vanish. For Jewish survivors, their families and the wider Jewish diaspora, Auschwitz symbolises their struggle and persecution. The reconstruction of the site and its exhibitions were done piecemeal and expanded over the years. The main focus today is the original camp (Auschwitz I) and the killing facilities at Auschwitz II (Birkenau). The distance between them is a couple of miles, with the option to walk between each part of the museum or take a free shuttle bus. Museum staff recommend at least 90 minutes at each section, in order to take in wholly the structures and exhibitions, as well as to get the most out of a visit. It is also recommended to seek the expertise of a guide or join a guided tour. Stepping into this sorry world once devoid of all empathy and compassion – where people were deliberately dehumanised and turned into ash – is a brave move. Just looking at its rows of barbed-wire fences, menacing guard towers, the blank rows of uniform wooden and red-brick blocks is enough to make one's stomach sink. Auschwitz's austere design and ambience is haunting to this day. Armed with the knowledge of what occurred here – the obscene medical experiments conducted by Dr Josef Mengele, the gassing of hundreds of thousands of innocent people, the executions, the suffering and the starvation – Auschwitz offers the starkest reminder that even the most cultured and advanced people hold a ready and willing capacity for wickedness. The profound racism of the Nazis is represented in the reconstructed gas chamber, the ruins of the others.

Above, left: Gas chamber I, converted from a crematorium, at Auschwitz's main camp. It operated between August 1940 and July 1943

Above, right: SS leader Heinrich Himmler on a visit to Auschwitz III camp in 1942

Above: The rail track leading to the ramp area and Auschwitz's extermination facility

The camp's entry into history began not long after Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. Hitler wished to expand his regime's territory, to Germanise other lands and colonise Poland under the Lebensraum ('living space') ideology. How an out-of-the-way collection of villages became the epicentre and eventual symbol of the Holocaust began with its development as a concentration camp for Polish prisoners and its subsequent growth as a business venture for German industrialists. Transport links proved crucial as well, as was its ready access to abundant natural resources in the immediate area. Alongside the original camp, IG Farbenindustrie AG built a synthetic rubber and liquid fuels plant (on land taken

Image source: Getty

BLOCK 11

The SS experimented with Zyklon-B Gas for the first time in the basement of Block 11

At Auschwitz's main camp, Block 11 became the building that prisoners feared most of all. Those caught attempting to escape or suspected of subterfuge were taken there. Block 11's courtyard is also where routine floggings and executions occurred. It is here, too, that Zyklon-B was tested for the first time, in late August and early September 1941.

Hauptsturmführer SS Karl Fritzsch, deputy commandant of Auschwitz, suggested using the crystallised cyanide-based bug repellent. Between 20 and 30 Soviet prisoners of war were taken to the basement in Block 11, which had been turned into a temporary gas chamber, and gassed. On 3 September 1941, the Nazis increased the number of prisoners killed at one time. Packing in 600 POWs, 250 Polish from the camp hospital and ten prisoners from the dreaded penal company (a corps isolated from the rest of the camp and worked to death) into 28 cells, it took several days for all the prisoners to die.

Image source: Getty

The much-feared Block 11 building at Auschwitz, where prisoners were tortured and executed by the SS

from its original owners). A former Polish Army barracks by the Vistula river grew rapidly into a sprawling complex that aided the German war effort. From its founding in 1940 to 1942, Auschwitz was exclusively a concentration camp for rounded-up and arrested Poles, with prisoners dying mostly through hard labour, appalling living conditions, disease and, more often than not, starvation. The sign above the main camp gate, Arbeit Macht Frei ('work sets you free'), has become an iconic image associated with Auschwitz; a message with a ghoulish irony attached. Between 1942 and 1944, the Birkenau section of the camp became exclusively an extermination facility, with selections made on the Judenrampe (which can be visited today). It is at the Judenrampe where Mengele selected his human guinea pigs, often twins, and took them away to perform macabre experiments.

Above: Child survivors at Auschwitz-Birkenau on the day of the camp's liberation by the Red Army, 27 January 1945

Unlike the other Nazi death camps built on Polish soil at Treblinka, Sobibor, Bełzec and Chełmno, Auschwitz still stands and draws millions of visitors every year. Treblinka and others were completely dismantled by the SS as they attempted to remove all traces of their existence. When covering up their crimes, they planted trees, re-landscaped the vicinity and transformed what were always relatively small facilities into what appeared to be farms of no great significance. Years later, the soil and archeological digs would reveal evidence of the evil that occurred, but the death camps were erased. The reason Auschwitz is better known in wider culture is not only to do with the unique aspects of the concentration and death camp, but because only a handful of people ever survived Treblinka, Sobibor, Bełzec and Chełmno. The camps, too, are located in much further-flung corners of Poland, whereas Auschwitz

> "The Holocaust was unique as an industrialised death machine event, on a scale never before known and committed by a supposedly civilised society. Auschwitz screams to us to remember what happened"

Image source: Getty

Above: Photographs were taken of the prisoners until 1942. This is thought to be of a French boy

Right: The arrival of Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz in the summer of 1944

is far more accessible to both foreign travellers and Polish residents.

The chance to see the ruins of the gas chambers, or the reconstructed one at Auschwitz I, takes us to an important but nightmarish precipice in our understanding of what was murder on an industrial scale. The death camps were set up like factories, each part oiled to achieve maximum results. Construction of gas chambers began at the first camp (Auschwitz I), but, between March and June 1943, four larger chambers were built and began their dreaded operation. The new buildings were purely intended to facilitate the murder of people en masse and dispose of their bodies in crematoriums. They consisted of undressing rooms, hermetically sealed gas chambers (disguised as showers) and ovens to burn the corpses. The SS man put in charge of the gas chambers at their construction stage, Karl Bischoff, believed the ovens in Crematoria II, III, IV and V could collectively reduce more than 4,000 people to ash in the space of 24 hours. As the Red Army advanced in late 1944 and into the first month of 1945, the SS attempted to cover up their crimes by blowing up the crematoria at Birkenau. Crematoria IV was partly destroyed during the Sonderkommando uprising on October 1944 (an episode of defiance and resistance among many during the Holocaust). Crematoria I – at Auschwitz I – was restored to its original state as part of the museum's exhibitions. At Birkenau, where the ruins of the other crematoria still stand, is the site of what became known as the Little Red House, a makeshift gas chamber that operated near

OTHER CONCENTRATION CAMPS

The Nazis held prisoners in camps all over conquered areas of Europe

CAMP 1
Bergen-Belsen

Bergen-Belsen is primarily remembered as the camp in which Anne Frank perished

Location: Bergen, Germany
Time zone: UTC+1 Currency: Euro

Constructed in 1935, Bergen-Belsen began its existence as a barracks and soldier-training facility. When the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, it quickly became a prisoner of war camp and then, in 1943, when overtaken by the SS, it was established as a concentration camp. It was at Bergen-Belsen, in February 1945, that teenage diarist Anne Frank and her sister Margot perished from either typhus or typhoid fever. A memorial to the girls is at the site.

Image source: Getty

Above: A memorial stone at Bergen-Belsen, a concentration and POW camp in Germany

CAMP 2
Mauthausen

Mauthausen was established almost immediately after the Anschluss in 1938

Location: Mauthausen, Austria
Time zone: UTC+1 Currency: Euro

In March 1938, August Eigruber, Gauleiter (regional head) of Upper Austria, announced the building of a concentration camp for undesirables, to be constructed at Mauthausen. During the war, as satellite camps grew around Mauthausen, forced labour for the war effort was the camp's main priority, although there were gas chamber facilities available. It is estimated 190,000 people passed through its gate and at least 90,000 of those died.

Image source: Getty

Above: Mauthausen camp in Austria was a large complex and was declared a memorial site in 1949

CAMP 3
Theresienstadt

Tens of thousands perished in this hybrid concentration camp and ghetto

Location: Terezín, Czechia
Time zone: UTC+1 Currency: Czech koruna

From one-time holiday destination for Prague's nobles to Jewish ghetto, Theresienstadt is unique in the history of the Holocaust. Explored in depth in Claude Lanzmann's *The Last of the Unjust* (2013), the ghetto-camp hybrid was used by the Nazis for propaganda purposes – known as Operation Embellishment – showcasing a rich cultural life and relative ordinariness, behind which lay the more truthful picture of death and constant terror.

Image source: Getty

Above: Many died in Theresienstadt, and around 88,000 were sent from here to extermination camps

Image source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-N0827-318 / CC-BY-SA 3.0

Image source: Getty

Image source: Getty

Birkenau camp, until the construction of the other chambers.

Auschwitz-Birkenau houses thousands of objects. When transports arrived through the railway gates at Birkenau and the selection process was made – separating those who were chosen to work and those chosen to proceed directly to the gas chambers – people's belongings and personal effects were gathered, stored and pillaged. The museum houses thousands of items such as shoes, eyeglasses, artworks, prosthetics, prison garments, pocket watches, shaving brushes, suitcases bearing the names of their owners, rings, spoons and utensils. It strikes home – these belonged to people. Each object tells its own story, reveals its own history. There are also items related to the camp's notorious medical experiments, such as a genealogical chair, and the gas chambers (a door, shower cap, Zyklon-B tins, and even a furnace).

Above: Suitcases belonging to Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Personal effects and goods were sorted and looted afterwards

Above, right: The infamous inscription above the main gate at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which translates to 'work sets you free'

There are few museums in our world as haunting and tragic as the Auschwitz-Birkenau. Seeking to enlighten and educate on our worst proclivities and excesses, the Holocaust was unique as an industrialised death machine event, on a scale never before known and committed by a supposedly civilised society. Every stone, every piece of wood, every building, every object associated with Auschwitz screams to us to remember what happened almost 80 years ago. What we take from the museum and the Holocaust itself, which day by day drifts away from living memory into the fog of history, is equally what we bring to it in our hearts and minds. Auschwitz is a warning from the past to our present. All the tears wept in the world would never capture the anguish or sorrow felt by the survivors or those who perished. By making the trip to Auschwitz we are invited to empathise, understand its painful history and renew our sense of humanity at a venue where inhumanity flourished for so long.

> "The ovens in Crematoria II, III, IV and V could collectively reduce more than 4,000 people to ash in the space of 24 hours"

Image source: Alamy

LOCATION

TIME ZONE

UTC+5

CURRENCY

Russian ruble

TOP TIP

You'd be better off hiring a guide from Perm, as finding the museum yourself or using public transport can be tricky.

Image source: Alamy

DO NOT TRAVEL

PERM-36 MUSEUM

THE SOLE SURVIVING GULAG CORRECTIVE-LABOUR CAMP, NOW A MUSEUM, HAS BEEN REMODELLED TO FIT A SURGE IN SOVIET NOSTALGIA AND NATIONALIST FERVOUR

In 2008, a Moscow television station ran an opinion poll. The aim was to find – and declare – the greatest Russian of all time. Joseph Stalin, was, for a good majority of the campaign, the frontrunner. The producers were alarmed by this surprise showing, and then concerned at this unexpected leaning. In a bid to stop it, they pleaded with voters to pick somebody else. In all, 50 million Russians voted in the poll, and many of them claimed Stalin as their man. Although eventually pipped by Saint Alexander Nevsky, Stalin's popularity led to a discussion in the country, which fed into other areas of cultural remembrance and, indeed, cultural forgetting.

'Uncle Joe' was a mass-murdering dictator whose corrective-camp labour system, known as Gulag ('Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei', translated as Main Administration Camp), led to the displacement and deaths of millions. Mid-20th-century Russia and its rocket-paced progress was built on the backs, and then the bones, of the dead – when it comes to infrastructure programmes like roads and canals, that's meant pretty much literally. But to many, Stalin was the leader who saved them from the Nazis during World War II and created a socialist country that went from an agrarian state to global superpower in a heartbeat.

Top: Exhibitions and displays at Perm-36 have been changed to focus on timber production, not political repression

Above: Perm-36 is the only remaining Gulag camp in tact today

The development of the Gulag system happened piecemeal and grew into an industry of total horror.

There is nothing to celebrate. But unlike in post-war Nazi Germany, Russia never underwent a soul-searching phase when the USSR collapsed. Archives remained firmly shut and Stalin could never quite be depicted as one of the 20th century's great monsters, as in other western countries.

For a while, the Gulag system or crimes against humanity such as the Holodomor (the state-sanctioned famine in Soviet Ukraine) were kept out of sight and out of mind.

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Archives of Adjara

There has been no attempt by any Russian administrations to criminalise acts of the past or even recognise them as crimes. Nikolai Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to party delegates in 1956, denouncing Stalin and his rule, wasn't formally recognised by the USSR as historical fact until 1989.

The British and German use of concentration camps in South Africa and Namibia provided a model for to be followed. Armed with their colonialist inspiration, Lenin and Trotsky found an ingenious way to rid the country and land of undesirables, but also have them working for the country's interests.

In the early days, prisons were overcrowded, while the camps operated in disarray. Anarchists and socialists were getting word out to their friends in the west that they were being politically purged and repressed. Facing a PR disaster, the administration decided to send enemies into far-flung corners of the country. The largest country on earth, stretching from Europe to the Pacific and up to the Arctic, was perfect for this.

Close to the point where Russia becomes Asia is the city of Perm. From 1940 to 1957, it was renamed 'Molotov' and was, during the Cold War era, closed to all foreigners. Gulag camps were dotted all around the country, but only Perm-36 has survived almost entirely intact, through the hard efforts of volunteers. Perm-36 – located 95 kilometres away from the city, in the village of Kuchino – stopped being

Top, right: Solovetsky archipelago: a bleak place, far from the civilised world

Top, left: Gulags were oppressive and hard places to survive

Above: Demonstrators gather in Batumi in 1917

Image source: Getty

THE FIRST CAMP

After the October Revolution, Lenin's clampdown on political enemies paved the road to the corrective-labour camp system

The Solovetsky archipelago in the White Sea region of Arctic Russia was deemed a perfect place to send what the Bolsheviks coined as 'class enemies' – later known as 'wreckers' – those who sought to undermine the revolution and sabotage, through political agitation, espionage or literature, the Soviet state.

It wasn't just Tsarists, clergy and aristocrats seen as undesirable to the state, but factions of rival socialists. Knowing he had to consolidate his grip on the country and wipe out dissent, Lenin summed up in a semi-joking quip to a comrade his intentions towards fellow revolutionaries: "It will be after we hanged the last Socialist-Revolutionary that the first Menshevik will get hanged."

In the wake of the Red Terror, instigated after a failed assassination attempt on Lenin's life, rivals were rounded up and sent to prisons, but initial results were shambolic. Word kept reaching the West, too, that comrades were being persecuted by the regime.

By early 1923, transports to Solotvesky began in earnest. Under the direct control of the Cheka, the Russian secret service, by that time known as the GPU, socialists began arriving that summer and were kept away from the other prisoners.

Granted the sort of privileges – access to books, no work detail – that would be unthinkable in later years, Solovetsky was a cruel and deadly place where murder and torture were everyday norms. It was here, too, that the 'eat-as-you-work' policy came into terrible effect. Those who were not physically strong enough were simply allowed to perish.

Image source: Shutterstock

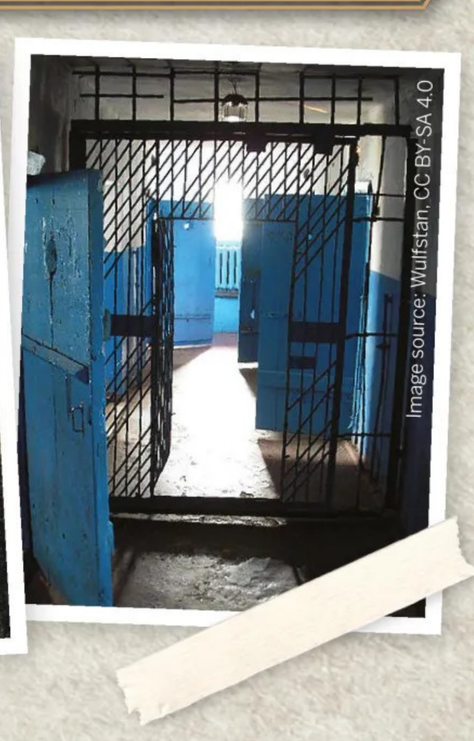


Image source: Wulfstan, CC BY-SA 4.0

Right: Nobel Prize winner, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, as a prisoner in a Gulag camp, 1946. Solzhenitsyn wrote the acclaimed *The Gulag Archipelago* about his experiences

Far right: The museum at Perm-36, a desolate place ringing with horror and a nightmare past

Image source: Getty

"KOLYMA"

In the far north east of Russia, the Kolyma region became a byword for Stalinist cruelty and his oppressive regime

The port town of Magadan sits on the Sea of Okhotsk in the extreme north east of Russia. Founded in 1930, it became a major administrative hub for mining industries under the purview of the corrective-labour camp system in the area. It is literally a town built for and by slaves of the state and the region 'Kolyma' crystallises the brutality and horrifying conditions endured by hundreds of thousands who were forced to work there. If you were sent to Kolyma to carry out your sentence, there was the distinct possibility of never returning. Prisoners had to endure a journey of up to three months just to get there. Temperatures in wintertime plunged to -45. It wasn't unknown for prisoners' food to freeze as they ate.

The camps in these far-flung locations served dual purposes. Firstly, prisoners were extremely isolated. Some Gulag camps didn't need fences because walking into the wilderness would be a death sentence and deterrent enough. Secondly, regions like Kolyma were rich sources of minerals and materials needed to support the Soviet Union and build up the national economy.

Stalin was obsessed with turning Russia into a superpower and for that to happen massive infrastructure programmes would have to be implemented. The perfect people to do this were 'class enemies'. Since the October Revolution, mass arrests created a potential workforce and Leon Trotsky espoused the idea early on that prisoners should form work battalions. Stalin increased arrests as and when – most famously during what became known as the Great Terror – to fulfil his maniacal economic vision.

Left: Solovetsky archipelago: a bleak place, far from the civilised world

Below: Prisoners at a Gulag camp (Camp 013), in 1951. They often used primitive, makeshift tools to complete arduous tasks, as part of massive infrastructure programmes or the export economy

Bottom left: Perm-36 is left almost exactly how it was left once the final prisoners were gone

Bottom right: A Moscow monument to victims of political repressions

a camp/colony in 1988, and since then has been developed as both a memorial and a museum to the Gulag system.

Since 1995, the site had operated as a museum dedicated to the history of political repression, not just Soviet prisoners of the state, which could include POWs, spies, ordinary criminals and the like. 20 years of restoration went into the project. 20 structures – predominantly made from wood – needed attention and the site covered 12,500 square kilometres. This was a passion project for the enthusiasts and volunteers who saw it as their mission to restore the place and help in understanding Russia's recent past and the communist-era crimes against its people.

From the start, however, funding was a problem and local government funding bodies proved tight-fisted. In 1998 and 2000, three buildings were selected for repair in what had been a high security zone: an infirmary, hut and administration headquarters. The estimated cost of this endeavour was 3.5 million roubles. The museum secured a measly 1,355 roubles from the regional coffers. Attempting to restore a building damaged by fire in 2004, a job estimated at over 1 million roubles, they secured 860 in funding. To save as much money as possible and keep down costs, the museum did all its own repair work ad hoc, using the same team time and time again.

Things were looking up in 2004 when UNESCO advised it should be included as a world heritage site. But for that to happen, there needed to be more bureaucratic wrangling

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Shutterstock

and for Perm-36 to receive federal funding. The Ministry of Culture told the directors that there wasn't any money available to speed through the project and any restoration jobs, planned to fit UNESCO's demands, must be privately funded.

The repression against the museum started in earnest in 2012, along with other targets in Russia. It began with a general assault on NGOs and extended to other cultural outlets that received foreign money. Organisations had to be registered as 'foreign agents' – a specific Stalinist term in vogue again – and taxes raised to discourage them from operating. Memorial, a human rights organisation which ran Perm-36, as Ola Cichowlas wrote in a New Republic article in June 2014, found itself the centre of a 'political game'. It got worse. Gas and electricity supplies were cut off and raids took place. Because of its remit as a memorial to political repression run by a human rights crew, which covered the entire spectrum of Soviet history, not just the Stalin era, it came up against not only what might be deemed a resurgent nationalism, spurred on further by episodes such as the Crimea crisis and the battles with the Ukraine administration, but a campaign directly against the museum. 'Locals' reported Perm-36 for 'vindicating' Ukrainian and Lithuanian nationalists for fighting the Soviet Union. The central crux, here, is that Perm-36 was considered anti-Russian and was 'rewriting history to suit its own aims', rather than offering brutal truths about the past.

A new governor decided not to hand over any money to the museum at all in 2014 and refused to sponsor the examination needed to secure UNESCO status. Things got worse, however, when Perm-36 was removed entirely from

> "Funding was a problem and local government funding bodies proved to be tight-fisted"

the government's cultural policy toward remembrance of victims of political repression. This is most interesting, because it removes the most sensitive aspect of the memorial. Public awareness programmes were abolished, too, and a national body took over the running of the camp. Shmyrov described how lumping prisoners under one blanket category offered a deliberate perversion of history: "We filmed one display. It told about the prisoners of that camp. Like any camp, it confined actual dissidents and human rights advocates together with, literally, Nazi collaborators, as well as recidivist gangsters, and spies. The paradox is that, according to the display we filmed, there was no difference between the former and the latter, which is both immoral and unprofessional."

What the future holds for Perm-36, whether it becomes a UNESCO world heritage site or not, the lack of care towards the camp and the complete lack of consideration for its history – the camp is structurally being altered with walls being painted and asphalt driveways laid down – is disturbing. There has been no dialogue in modern-day Russia about its recent and distant past. Communist atrocities are disputed or rationalised.

GULAG SITES

The corrective-camp labour system led to the deaths of millions

SOLOVETSKY ARCHIPELAGO

The Solovetsky Islands corrective camps – particularly the monastery complex on Bolshoy Solovetsky – housed political prisoners from 1923 until 1939, when it was closed and became a naval base due to its proximity to Finland. The camp's prisoners were involved in forestry and later the construction of the White Sea Canal, which under Stalin was ordered to be completed in 20 months. Prisoners used very primitive tools and sometimes dug with nothing but their hands. Today, Bolshoy Solovetsky is a UNESCO world heritage site.

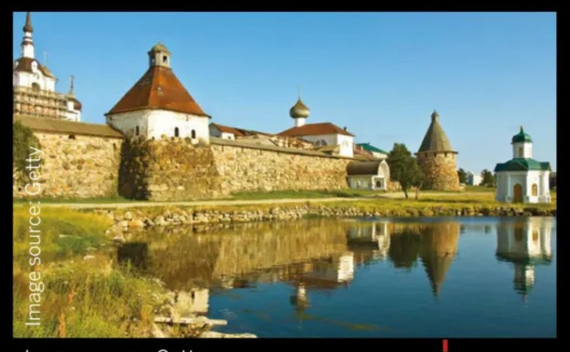


Image source: Getty

WHITE SEA CANAL

The White Sea Canal project was one of Josef Stalin's early obsessions. Overseen by SLON (Northern Camps of Special Significance), the canal stretched from Kem in the White Sea all the way to Saint Petersburg. Stalin ordered it built in 20 months. Prisoners were forced to build all construction material – from scaffolding to digging tools – by hand. 24 hours a day, prisoners toiled and were urged to work longer in reward for better rations. The canal was a Soviet triumph, but it came with a truly devastating human cost.

Image source: Shutterstock

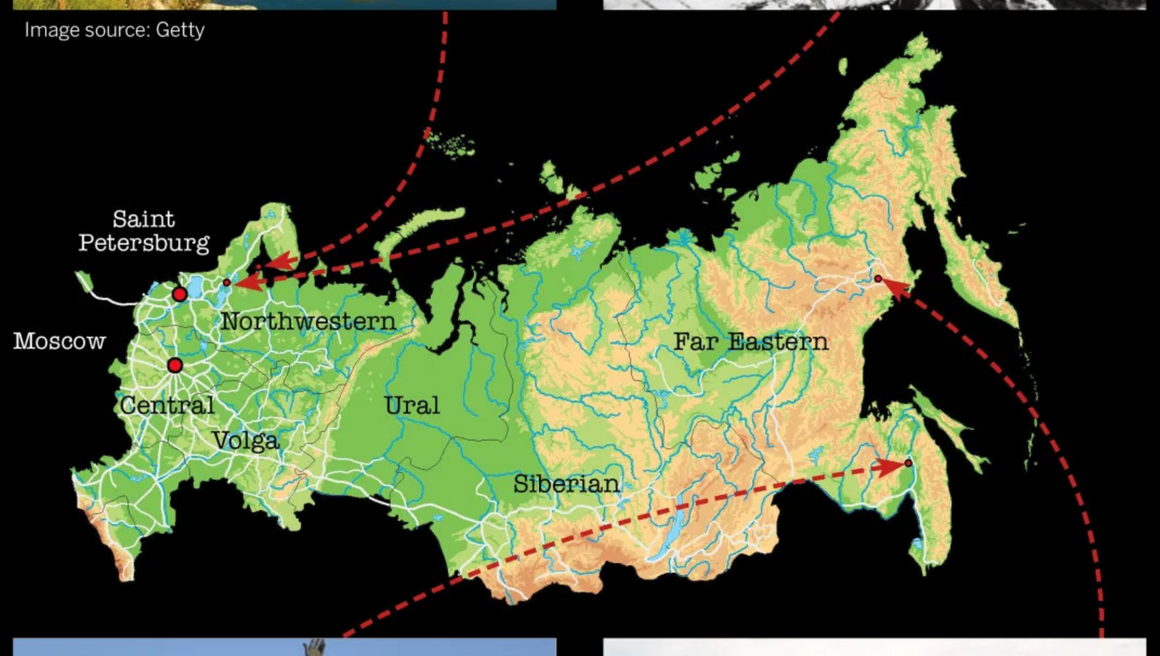


Image source: Alamy

KOMSOMOLSK-NA-AMURE

Celebrated as a city founded by enthusiastic communist youth workers, from Komsomol – reflected in the name given to the city – a large part of the workforce was shipped in from regional prison camps and built infrastructure and shipyards. As with so many former sites that formed Gulag camps, evidence of the corrective-labour camp system is long gone. But there are tours available that take in former quarries and cemeteries where prisoners were buried and other sites.

Image source: Getty

KOLYMA REGION

The Kolyma highway out of Magadan is built on the bones of the dead. Many of the villages and towns dotted around the region were built by prisoners during the 1930s and into the 1950s. Today, few glimpses of the region's deadly past remain. Some are radioactive no-go areas. Places this far east are rarely explored, but places like Spokoiny and Dneprovsky offer surviving ruins and glimpses of the Gulag camps that proliferated in the area during the Soviet heyday.

The Choeung Ek memorial is designed in the style of a Buddhist stupa and contains skulls and instruments of torture

LOCATION

TIME ZONE

UTC+7

CURRENCY

Cambodian riel

TOP TIP

Stalls selling snacks can be found near the entrance, but avoid eating and drinking when wandering around.

Image source: Thinkstock

CAMBODIA'S KILLING FIELDS

VISIT THE SITE OF ONE OF THE WORST MASS KILLINGS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Few people visit this beautiful Southeast Asian country specifically for its Killing Fields, but if one day you find yourself enjoying the mountains, beaches, temples and rivers of Cambodia, make sure you put by at least one day to experience one of the country's most important historical sites. The Killing Fields of Cambodia have a story to tell, and as harrowing as it may be to hear, to understand present-day Cambodia it's crucial that we listen to the stories of its dark past. Whether you know a little or a lot about the Khmer Rouge regime and the atrocities that took place between 1975 and 1979, you will gain a sobering insight into just how horrific this period was.

Of the hundreds of Killing Fields located around the country, the site of Choeung Ek is the most infamous, sitting approximately nine miles south of the country's capital, Phnom Penh. A tuk tuk from the city centre takes less than an hour, and there are tour operators that will tailor packages to suit your requirements, even picking you up from your accommodation and dropping you back. Make sure you dress respectfully before setting off,

Above: The Killing Tree is perhaps the most distressing part of Choeung Ek

covering your knees and shoulders, and take plenty of water as you might spend longer wandering through the site than you think you will. The entry fee into Choeung Ek is £5. Although the information signs throughout are useful, it's worth spending an extra £2 for a set of headphones, as the audio guide provides far greater insight. The commentary gives descriptions of each area as you walk through the site. You can go at your own pace, pausing the audio and replaying parts if you'd like to.

One of the first signs to capture your attention will be the 'truck stop' where prisoners, who had been collected from Tuol Sleng prison or even taken from their own homes, were dropped off after enduring a blindfolded journey to the site before being led to be executed in the ditches nearby. Arriving two or three times a month, each truck had 20 to 30 terrified victims inside, and as many as 300 prisoners would be killed in a single day. In total more than 20,000 people were brutally murdered at this one location in Cambodia.

A visual reminder of this, standing tall in the field, is the Choeung Ek memorial, designed in the style of a Buddhist

Insert image source: Thinkstock

Image source: Thinkstock

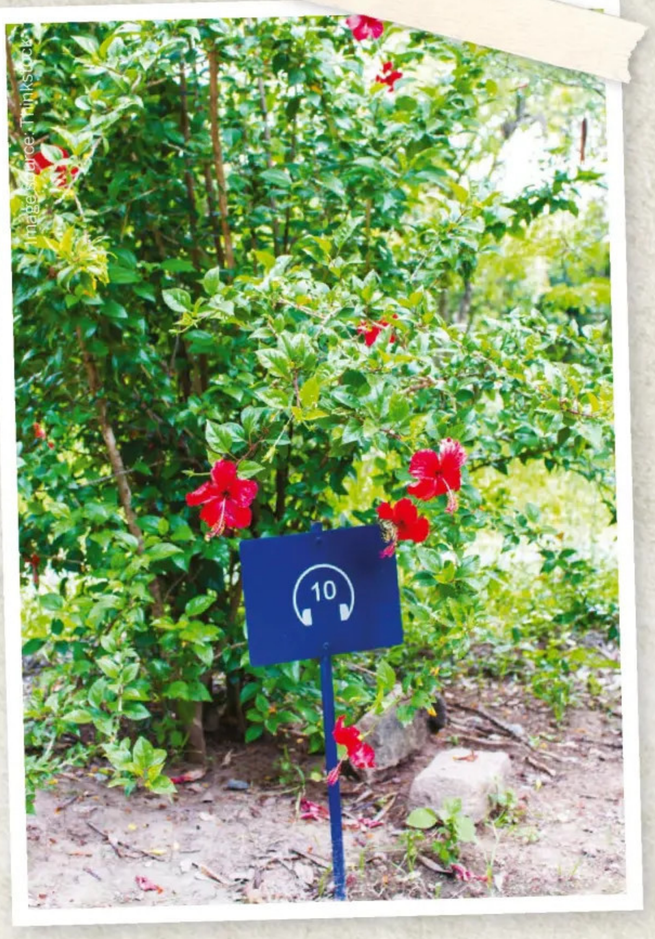


Image source: Thinkstock

stupa, which houses row upon row of thousands of human skulls, organised by gender and age. Also found here are some of the tools used by the inhumane executioners. Between 1.5 to 3 million people were murdered under Cambodian Prime Minister Pol Pot's brutal regime, through which he attempted to turn the country into a pure communist society. That was 25 per cent of the entire country's population. Pushed into pits after being beaten and hacked to death or being mutilated against trees – the hard, sharp bark ridges used to slit the throats of innocent Cambodians – dips in the ground are still visible as you walk around, with signs that simply read 'mass grave'. Perhaps more shocking and difficult to stomach is the infamous killing tree and its sign that reads: "Killing tree against which executioners beat children". Babies would be held by their legs, heads smashed against the tree, and then tossed into the pit below. This would happen in front of their mothers before the women were then raped and killed. Naturally this is the most upsetting part of the tour for many, too distressing to comprehend.

There's something tragically ironic about the calmness that the trees add to Choeung Ek once you know the role they played 40 years ago. Another tree was used specifically to hang a speaker through which loud music was played to drown out the sounds of the victims' cries and screams as they were being executed.

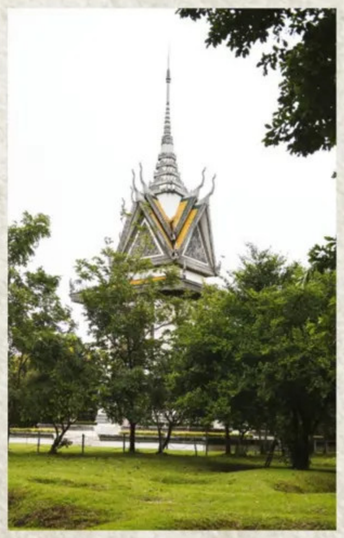
You'll also notice white, stone-like fragments poking up out of the dusty paths as you walk. It's not obvious what they are at first, but it soon becomes clear that they are pieces of human bone and teeth that have been revealed as rain has washed away the earth over the years. Occasionally you'll even spot scraps of clothing amongst the bone fragments. It's hard to believe what you're seeing, and even harder to believe how recent the barbarity was.

Choeung Ek is now a peaceful place as visitors silently try to process the shocking events from just four decades ago. The sounds of birds chirping in the trees and footsteps tenderly treading the dusty footpaths make for a day of mixed emotions. It's a disturbing experience; you will feel sad, moved and disgusted in equal measure. But you will not regret visiting Choeung Ek – the experience will open your mind and last with you forever.

Top, left: The Choeung Ek memorial houses thousands of human skulls arranged by age

Top, right: The audio guide is invaluable. You can pause it and replay sections so you can walk at your own pace

Below: Mass graves are visible in the ground



TUOL SLENG GENOCIDE MUSEUM

The former prison and interrogation centre near to Choeung Ek

Also known as Security Prison 21, or S-21, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum was a secondary school until 1975 when Pol Pot's security forces turned it into the largest detention centre in the country. Tour companies combine visits to both Choeung Ek and the museum, since they are only seven miles apart, and tuk-tuk drivers will wait while you visit one and then take you to the other.

Looking much like a school from the outside, with its multiple floors spread across five buildings that face a well-kept courtyard of green lawns, the exterior does little to prepare you for what's inside. As you walk from room to room, passing sheets of barbed wire, the eerie realisation that you're walking through classrooms-cum-prison cells is made all the more chilling as you discover the meaning behind the thousands of photographs displayed in the rooms. Every prisoner detained at S-21 had their photograph taken to prove to the Khmer Rouge that orders had been carried out. These black-and-white portraits of frightened faces are displayed in the museum, the number boards on their chests revealing the year the photo was taken. Other photos and artwork show the torture scenes themselves. It's certainly not for the faint-hearted.

Hiring a guide for a small fee enables you to hear some of the stories behind the people in the photographs. Alternatively you can hire an audio guide, or simply walk around by yourself.

In other rooms you'll find torture chambers, rusty beds and torture instruments. After being tormented and forced to admit guilt, many would be transported to Choeung Ek, but a large number were executed at S-21 too. Of the 14,000 people known to have entered the prison, only seven survived, and two of the survivors can sometimes be found at the site, relaying their stories.

Image source: Adam Cohn

Image source: Michael Gruijters

Insert image source: Thinkstock

The skulls of victims bear silent witness to the horror of genocide at the Nyamata site, one of several across Rwanda

LOCATION

TIME ZONE

UTC+2

CURRENCY

Rwandan franc

TOP TIP

The entire nation of Rwanda is at high altitude; travellers with respiratory conditions should plan accordingly.

Image source: Inisheer

RWANDAN REMEMBRANCE

THE VICTIMS OF THE BRUTAL 1994 GENOCIDE IN RWANDA ARE MEMORIALISED IN NUMEROUS LOCATIONS ACROSS THE NOW-PEACEFUL AFRICAN NATION

A quarter of a century ago, the spectre of genocide stalked the countryside of Rwanda, a small nation in East-Central Africa. Ethnic violence between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes erupted in a frenzy of death and destruction that claimed the lives of an estimated 800,000 people. Since those difficult 100 days in 1994 the nation has struggled to grasp the implications of such terrible carnage and subsequently made tremendous progress in reconciliation.

Still, those who lost their lives must be remembered, and memorial sites are scattered across the country. Significant among them are the Kigali Genocide Memorial located in Gisozi, just ten minutes from the heart of the capital city, and Murambi Genocide Memorial Site in the south of the country.

Above: French airborne troops stand guard at the airport in Kigali in August 1994, weeks after the June genocide occurred

The bodies of more than 250,000 genocide victims are interred at Gisozi, and the memorial has become the focal point of remembrance for the Rwandan people. Originally constructed as a place where the dead might be permanently buried and a location where families might come to grieve, the centre was initiated by the Kigali City Council in 2000 and later came under the auspices of the Aegis Trust, which developed three graphic exhibits with script in multiple languages. The centre officially opened in 2004 and includes an Education Centre, National Documentation Centre of the Genocide, and the quiet Memorial Gardens.

The centre presents the history of Rwanda prior to the genocide and conveys the events of the horror in context with other such sites around the world, including several

Insert image source: DoD photo by SRA Andy Dunaway

The belongings of those killed during the genocide were exhibited during the 25th anniversary commemorative events

Image source: Getty

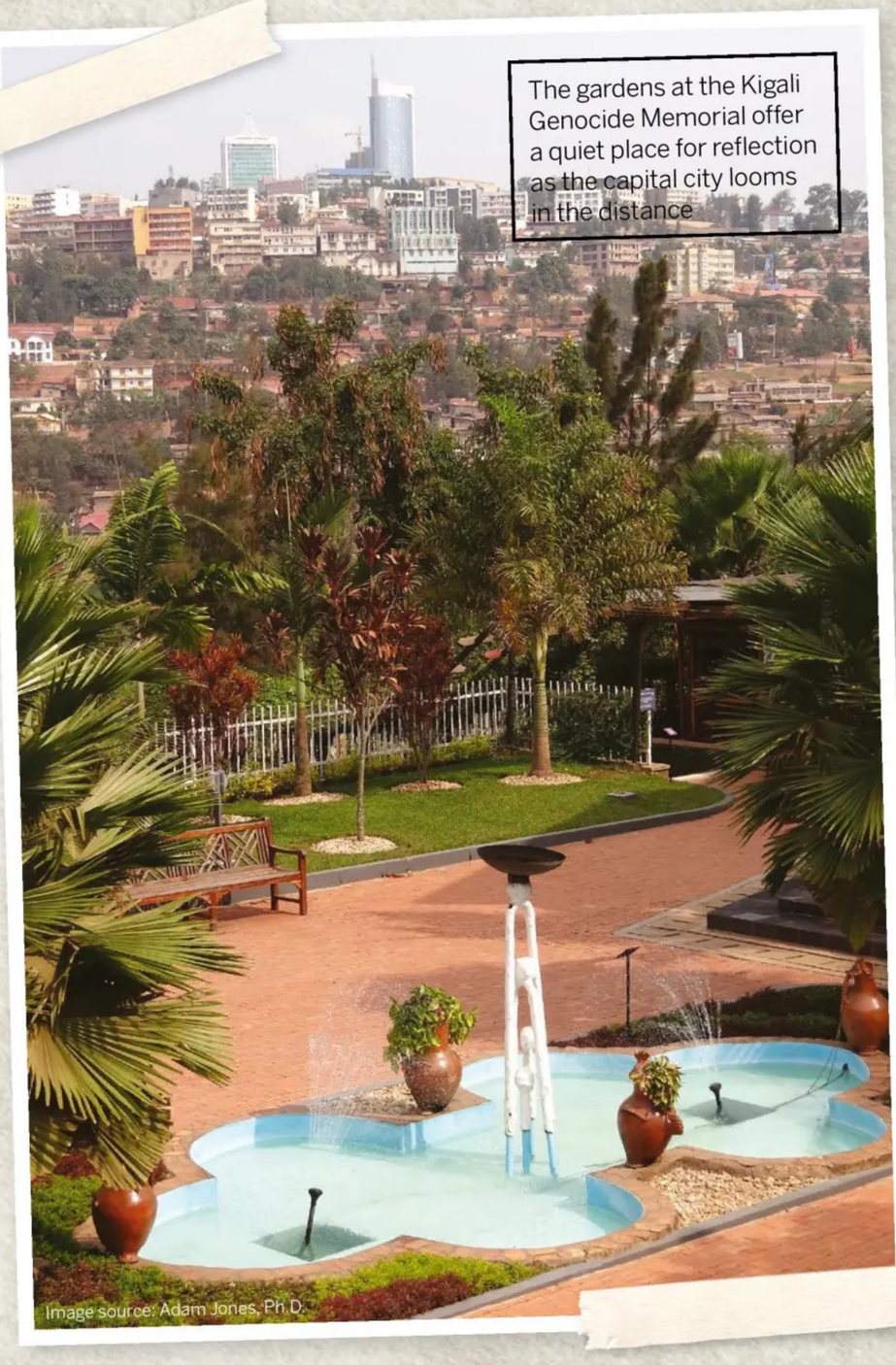
in Germany, Cambodia, Bosnia and Japan. Its exhibits document the difficult legacy of genocide around the world, attempting to place Rwanda's difficult period in historical context. They move to a poignant remembrance of the children who were slaughtered. Photographs, toys and transcripts of their last pitiful words are displayed. Everyday items, including some of the implements that became weapons used to inflict painful deaths upon the victims, are displayed.

The resting places of many victims are visible – buried in mass graves that encompass a significant area and contribute to the sense of shocking reality that is so pervasive. Audiovisual presentations provide riveting and heart-wrenching testimony from survivors of the slaughter and preserve for future generations the lessons of inhumanity, hysteria and violence that have so often produced tragic results on an incomprehensible scale.

Thousands of visitors come to the Kigali Genocide Memorial each year, and the site is easily accessible by taxi from Kigali. The centre is open daily, except Christmas and New Year's Day, and visitors should plan a minimum

> "The bodies of more than 250,000 genocide victims are interred at Gisozi"

of 90 minutes for a thorough orientation and guided tour, although some remain longer to contemplate their moving experience. On the last Saturday of each month, hours are limited due to Umuganda, a period during which Rwandans come together to perform work in their communities. Admission to the memorial is free of charge. However, guided tours for individuals or groups are moderately priced, and an audio guide is available along with a single rose to place as a tribute to those lost. Visitors are asked to maintain an attitude of reverence and respect throughout their time at the memorial, and children under the age of 12 are not permitted to visit.



The gardens at the Kigali Genocide Memorial offer a quiet place for reflection as the capital city looms in the distance

Image source: Adam Jones, Ph.D.

Below: The death of President Juvénal Habyarimana, an ethnic Hutu, sparked the genocide that devastated Rwanda in 1994

FROM THE ASHES OF GENOCIDE

The Rwandan people reconcile and remember, placing the horror of genocide in the past and looking towards a prosperous future

The 1994 Rwandan genocide was sparked with the assassination of President Juvénal Habyarimana on 6 April when his aircraft was shot down and he died in the crash. The president was an ethnic Hutu, and elements within the tribe blamed the rival Tutsis. The nightmare of genocide ensued, scarring the people and the nation forever.

However, a quarter of a century later, the nation is engaged in the continuing process of reconciliation and the pledge that such a horrific campaign of murder shall never occur again. Hutus who endorsed or participated in the extermination of Tutsis and those among the Hutu themselves who tried to defend the victims have come forward in remorse. Current Rwandan President Paul Kagame recently said that reconciliation has "taken root". It happened, he remarked, "because even perpetrators have come out to say 'We are sorry'. Survivors have also made a choice to forgive, which completes a circle of reconciliation."

French President Emmanuel Macron has also established a commission to review his country's role in Rwandan affairs in the early 1990s and its response during the period of genocide. Answers are expected within two years, while the relationship between Rwanda and France is being reestablished on a positive footing.

Image source: Templeton

“At Murambi visitors experience by far the most graphic evidence and emotional turmoil related to the genocide”

The centre’s outreach extends beyond its walls and across the country through educational programmes, while the genocide archives continues its work to document the atrocities of 1994, bring closure to families and preventing a recurrence.

At Murambi visitors experience by far the most graphic evidence and emotional turmoil related to the genocide in all of Rwanda. The images at Murambi are stark, harrowing and disturbing. An estimated 27,000 to 40,000 victims were murdered there after seeking refuge at a technical college site that was under construction at the time. Apparently those who led the victims to Murambi did so only to lure them to their grisly deaths. On 21 April 1994, militiamen moved in and began a systematic killing spree, wielding machetes that inflicted hideous wounds, clubs that crushed skulls and other implements of death. Only 34 people are believed to have survived the bloodbath.

A visit to Murambi begins with a short introductory film and information panels describing the atrocities that occurred there in a museum presentation, with much of their language placing blame on French peacekeeping troops, who were accused of failing to intervene to prevent the unfolding debacle. From there visitors are shocked at the macabre sights that confront their senses. The bodies of victims, men, women, and children, have been exhumed, preserved with powdered lime, and displayed to convey the horror of the event more graphically than any other image possible. The Murambi experience is not for the faint of heart. Those travelling with children are advised to make arrangements for their care prior to visiting; Murambi is no place for children.

Below: The Kigali Genocide Memorial site is just minutes from the heart of the capital city of Rwanda

Below: More than 5,000 people were massacred as they sought refuge from attack inside the Ntarama Church

Visitors pass outdoors and silently file past mass graves and unfinished areas that were originally meant to be classrooms, rather than death chambers. Soon they are confronted with wooden tables with the bodies of 848 victims lying atop them. Others who died in the murderous frenzy lie essentially where they fell, their bodies frozen in time and contorted in the last throes of death. Perhaps the most shocking rooms are the last, in which the bodies of murdered infants and children are preserved for astonished and deeply moved visitors to gaze upon in stunned disbelief.

Those considering a visit to Murambi are strongly advised to use discretion in planning. The memorial was founded only a year after the mass murders occurred. Admission is free of charge, but donations are welcome and actually expected. Most visitors require at least 90 minutes at the site, which is open daily. Travellers should hire a car and driver in Kigali for the trek, which takes less than an hour. Public transportation is available, but the route is not direct, and is somewhat time consuming.

Absolutely no photography or recording devices are allowed at Murambi, and such equipment must remain behind before entry is permitted. This rule is strictly enforced.

Insert image source: U.S. Department of the Treasury

Image source: Getty

Image source: Getty

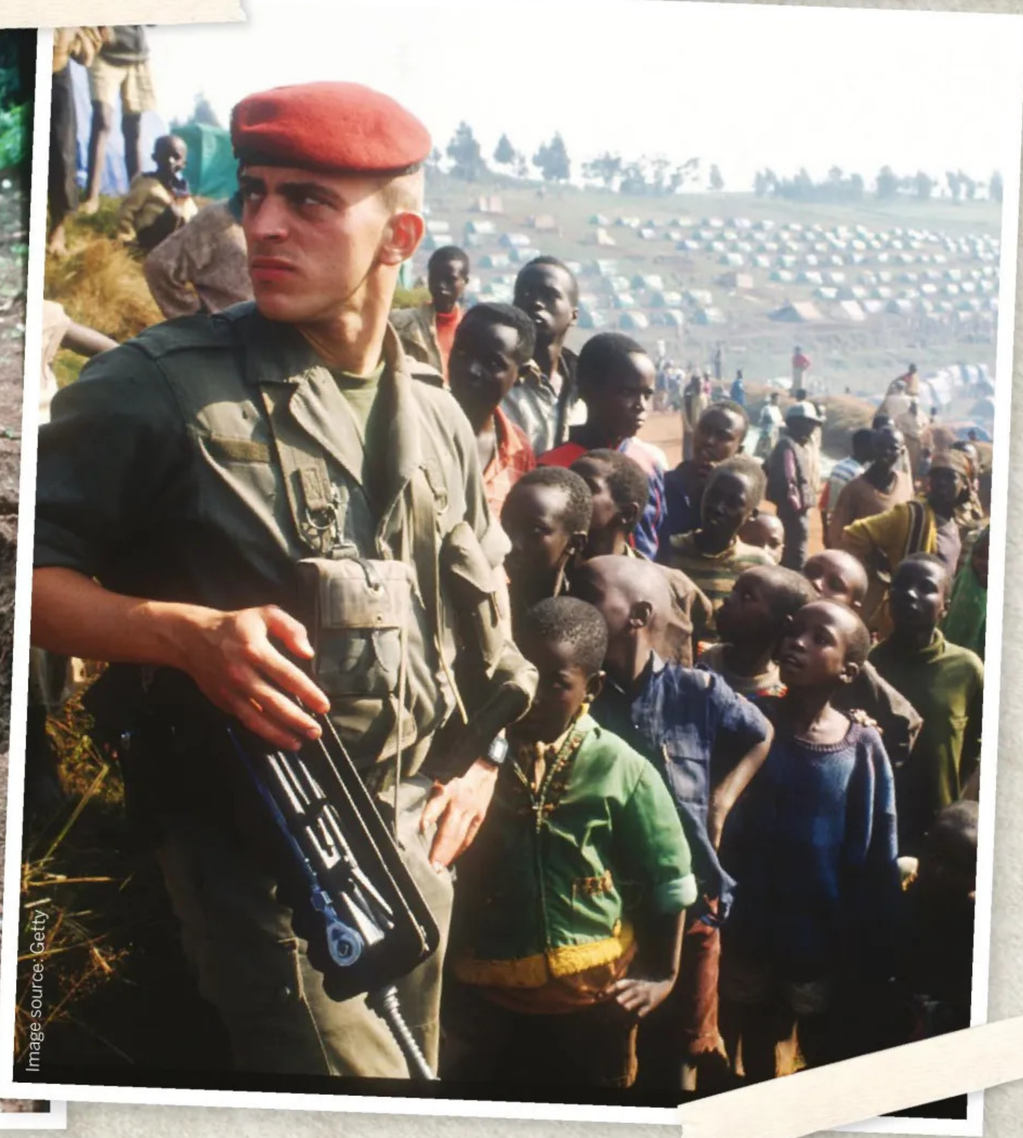


Image Source: Getty

Above: A night vigil was held to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the genocide

Far left: One of many mass graves scattered across the country

Left: A French soldier is greeted by Tutsi children at the Nyarushishi Tutsi refugee camp

WAR AND BATTLES

TAKE A TOUR OF SOME OF THE WORLD'S BLOODIEST AND DEFINING BATTLEFIELDS

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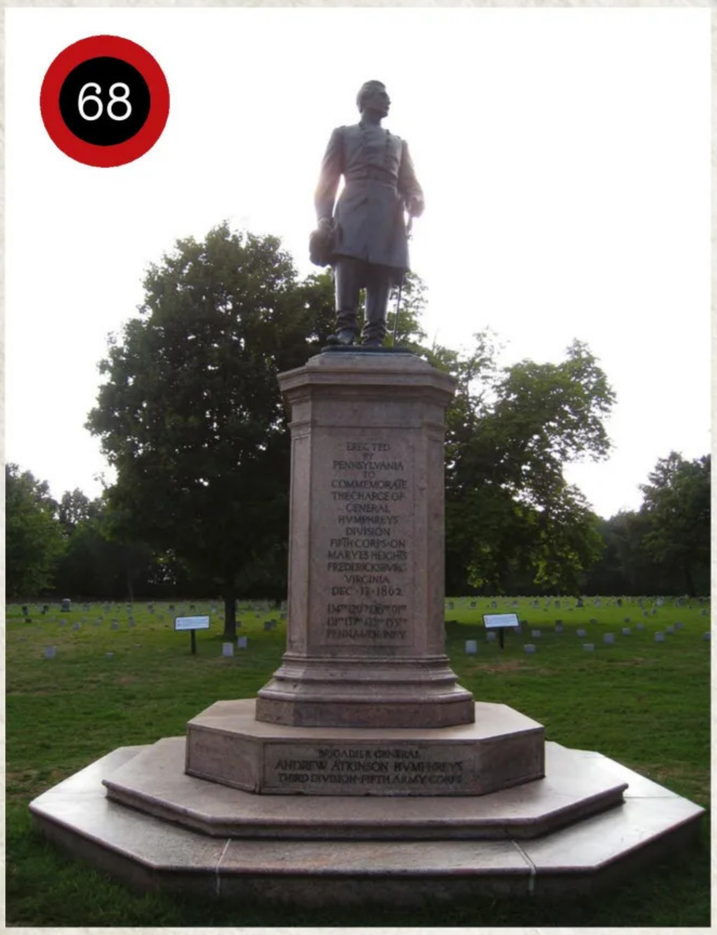

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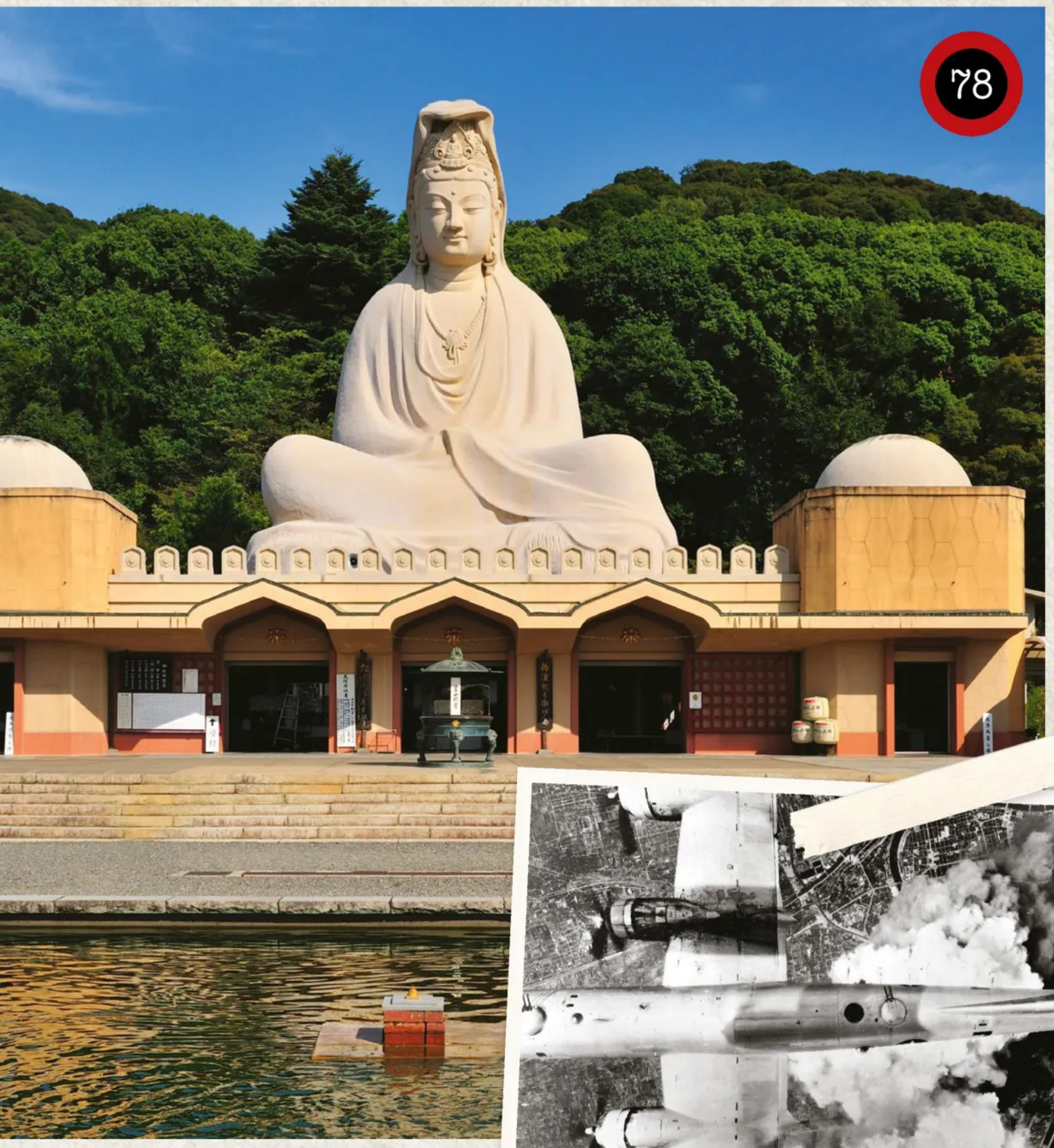
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REMEMBERING THE CIVIL WAR

This often-studied and much-written-about war in 1860s America left a legacy of sombre but informative tourist sites

Image source: NealVickers

MANASSAS

Education is a key part of this Virginian battlefield site

Location: Virginia
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** US dollar

It was in Virginia, in July 1861, that the Union and Confederate armies fought for the first time, on fields near Manassas that overlooked Bull Run. Just over a year later, they met again, on the Manassas plains, with the Confederates being the victors on both occasions. Today, the site is run by the National Parks Service (NPS), which offers walking tours that guide visitors through either the first or second battles. There are also living history demonstrations during the summer season. Archaeological work continues at the site, with a Civil War surgeon's burial pit being one of the most recent excavations.

FORT SUMTER

Pretty Charleston is where the Civil War began

Location: South Carolina **Time zone:** UTC-5 **Currency:** US dollar

On 12 April 1861, the Civil War really began, with Confederate soldiers attacking the Federal fort, Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbour. After less than two days and the deaths of two Union fighters, the Union soldiers defending the fort surrendered. Today, the fort is part of the Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park. The fort is only accessible by boat, so you will need to get a tour boat from the Fort Sumter Visitor Education Centre in Charleston. The fort itself also houses a museum, but there are no guided tours because of the high number of people who choose to visit the site.

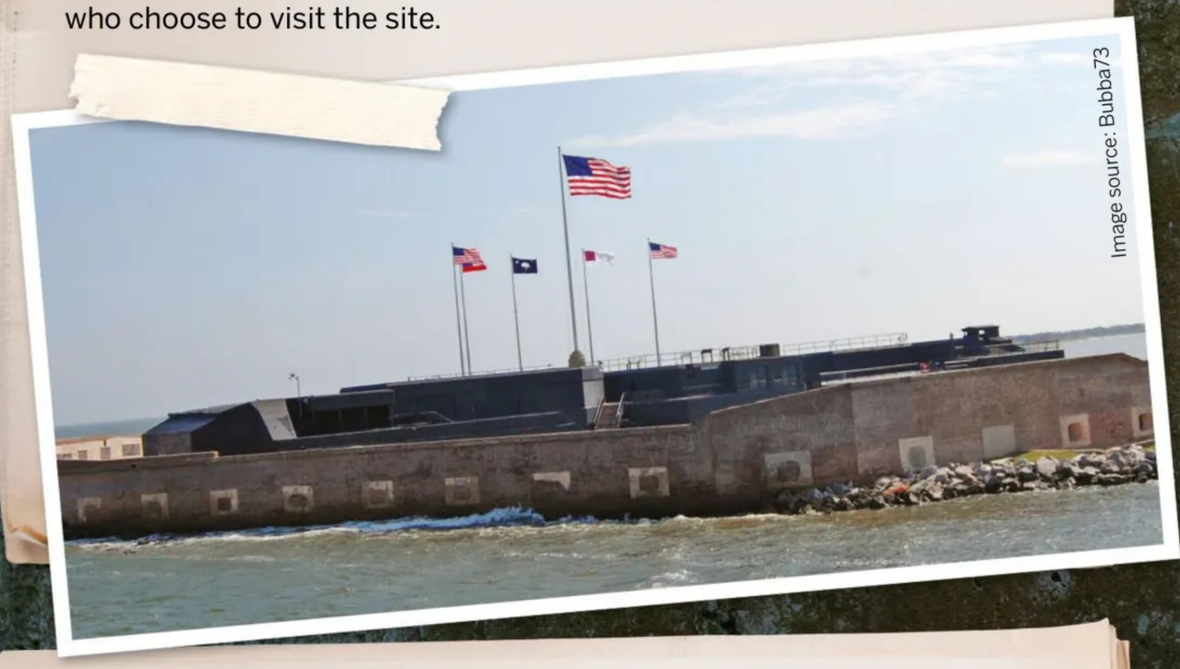


Image source: Bubba73

GLORIETA PASS

The 'Gettysburg of the West' saw the Confederates withdrawing from New Mexico

Location: New Mexico
Time zone: UTC-6
Currency: US dollar

Part of the Civil War's New Mexico Campaign, the Battle of Glorieta Pass took place in March 1862 in what is now the south-western state of New Mexico. It's been described as the 'Gettysburg of the West', and Confederates hoped it would break the Union's control of this area. It actually resulted in the Confederates having to withdraw from the New Mexico Territory, as it was then known. Today, the battlefield is the focus of the Pecos National Historical Park, where you can take part in guided walking tours to learn more. There is also a longer 'battlefield hike' if you prefer.

Image source: Maj. Elena C Bryan

SHILOH AND CORINTH

Head to Tennessee to remember two linked battles of 1862

Location: Tennessee
Time zone: UTC-5
Currency: US dollar

The Battle of Shiloh, in April 1862, involved around 65,000 Union troops and saw some 24,000 killed, injured or missing by the end of just two days of fighting. Despite this, there was no decisive victory, and Union forces went on to capture the vital railroad junction at nearby Corinth the following month. Although there are several local sites associated with the battles, a key place to visit is the Corinth Civil War Interpretative Centre, with its interactive displays and multimedia presentations on the two battles. Shiloh is described as one of the best-preserved Civil War battlefields.

Image source: Chris Light

VICKSBURG

Abraham Lincoln saw this Mississippi battle as the key to victory

Location: Mississippi
Time zone: UTC-6 **Currency:** US dollar

It was 1863, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, was the scene of a prolonged struggle. The Union Army would lay siege to the town for 47 days, until the Confederates finally surrendered to them on 4 July. Vicksburg was significant in military terms as it was the last major Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River, so capturing it was a key goal of the Union. There are now around 1,400 monuments and memorials here, as well as reconstructed forts and trenches. You can also watch demonstrations of muskets and cannons, as well as experience recreations of different aspects of Civil War life.

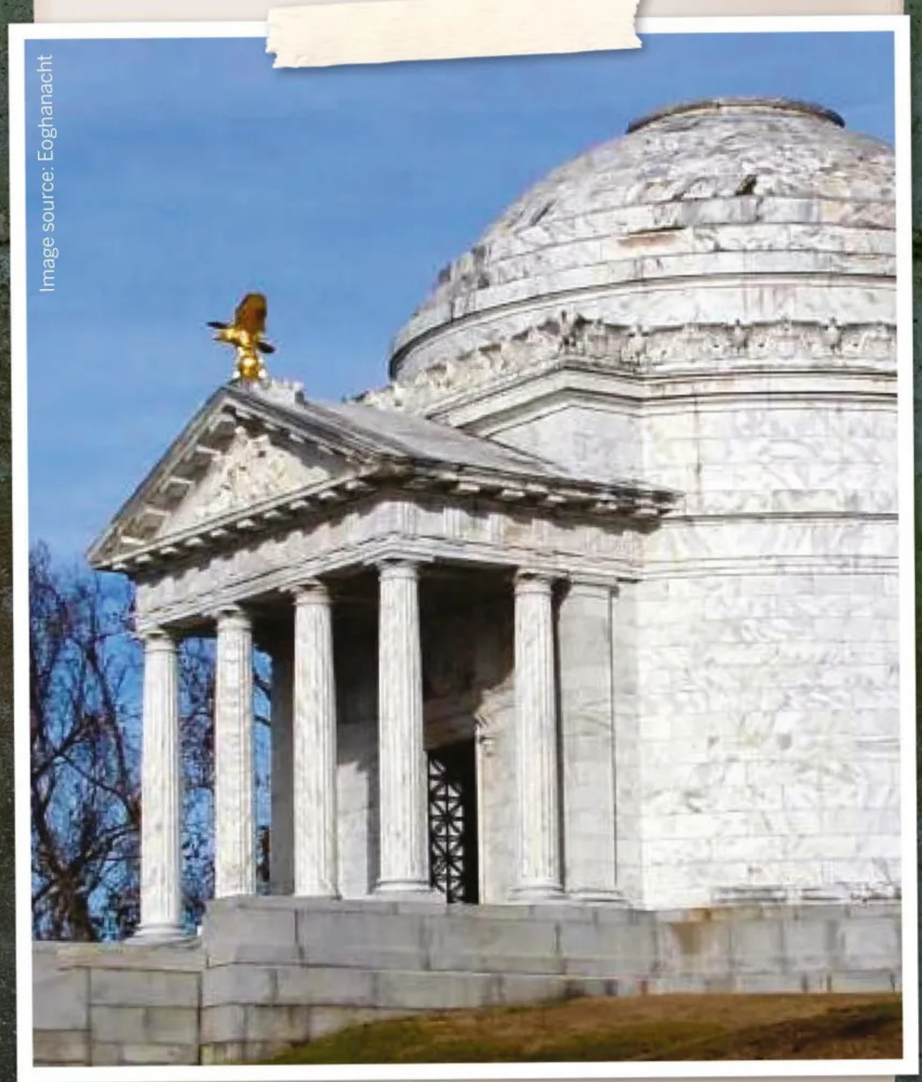


Image source: Eoghanacht

ANTIETAM

A brutal single-day battle took place here, in Maryland

Location: Maryland
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** US dollar

In Antietam, near Sharpsburg in Maryland, on one day in September 1862, nearly 23,000 soldiers were left dead or injured, or were declared missing as a result of a short battle. It resulted in a strategic victory for the Union, with its Commander General George B McClellan stopping Robert E Lee's Confederate invasion of Maryland.

At the site you can, at certain times of the year, visit the Pry House Field Hospital Museum, which was the battle HQ for George B McClellan, and now includes a recreation of an operating theatre, with information about how wounded soldiers were treated.

Image source: Sswonk

FREDERICKSBURG

A Union defeat here in December 1862 made Lincoln despair

Location: Virginia
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** US dollar

The site of a decisive victory for the Confederates, this Virginian battle involved nearly 200,000 soldiers and caused Abraham Lincoln to despair. He stated, "If there is a place worse than hell, I'm in it," on being told of the Union's defeat, and that the battle had been little more than the 'butchery' of Union soldiers. Confederate casualties were half those of the Union ones. The battle is today remembered at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, which commemorates three other major battles in addition to Fredericksburg. The Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Centre provides an orientation film, exhibits and brochures; there are also guided walking tours.

Image source: Something Original

GETTYSBURG

Gettysburg is one of the best-known Civil War sites

Location: Pennsylvania
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** US dollar

The Battle of Gettysburg, in July 1863, marked a turning point in the Civil War. Although it was the war's bloodiest battle, involving the largest number of casualties, it was also here that the Union soldiers beat attacks from the Confederates, under General Robert E Lee, stopping his invasion of the North. The National Military Park in Gettysburg now has a museum and visitor centre, and you can also watch 'living history demonstrations' – reenactments of the armies and their tactics on the battlefield itself. Nearby is the Soldiers' National Cemetery, which includes a monument to President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

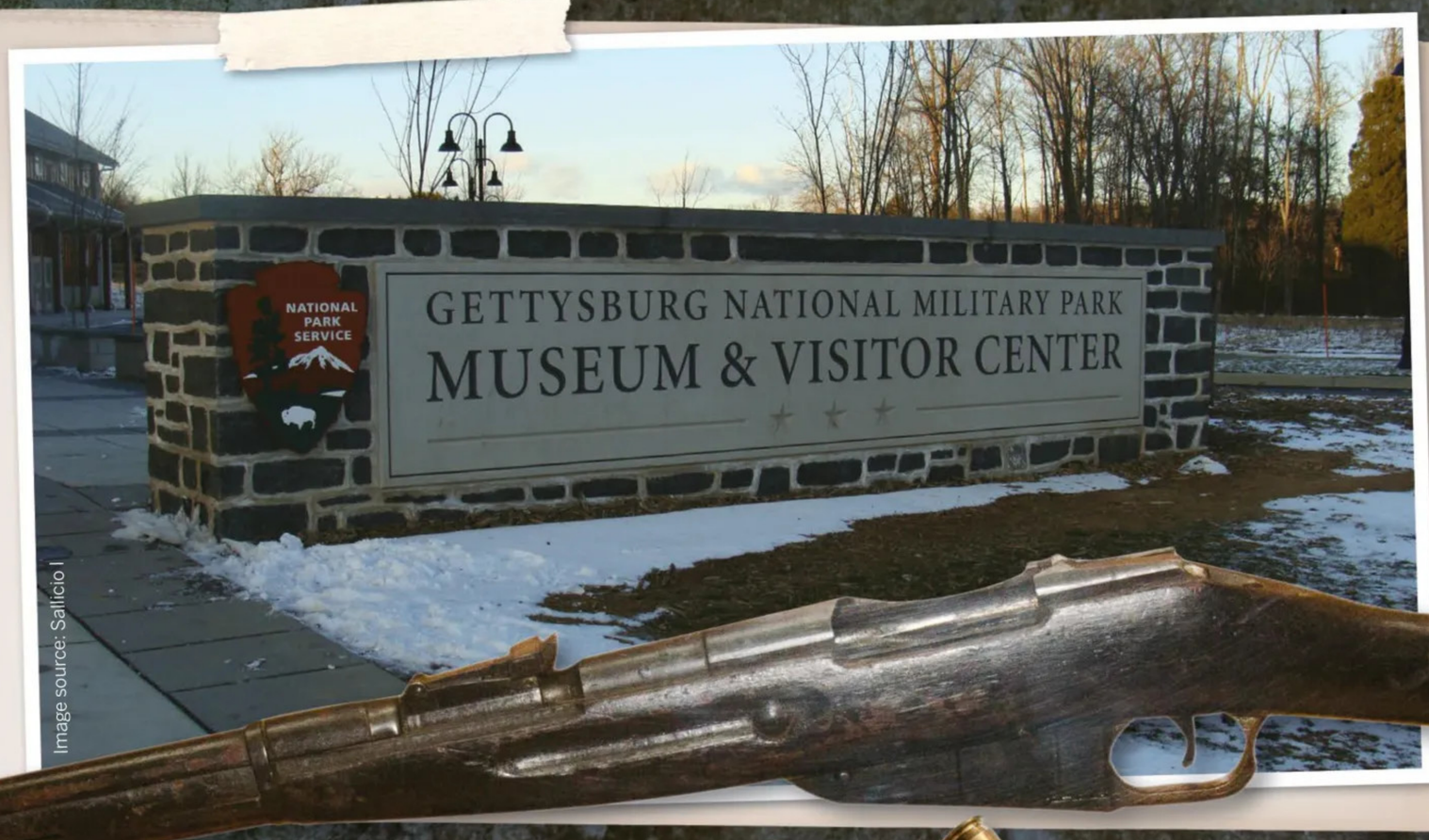
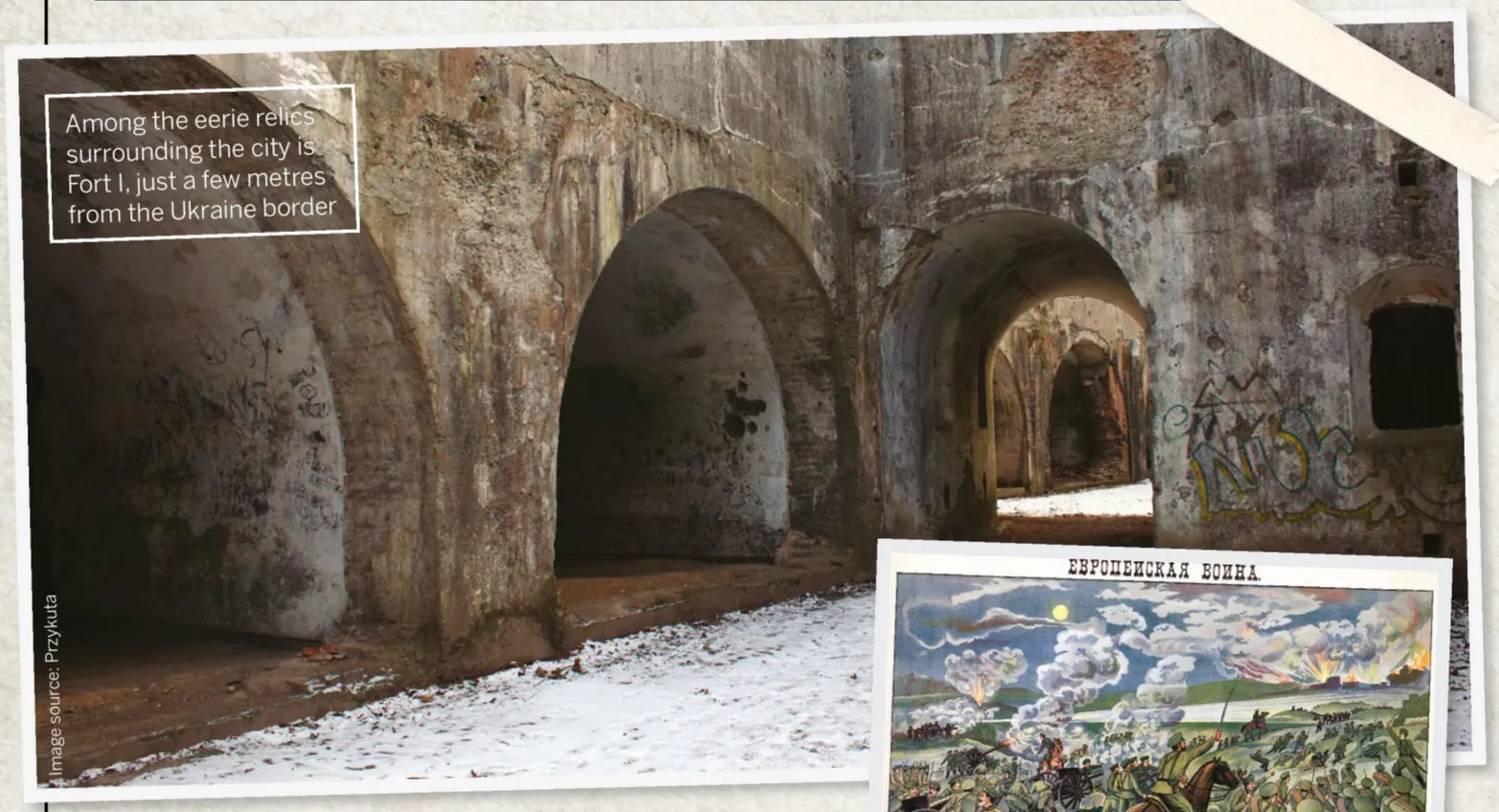


Image source: Sallicio I

WORLD WAR I BATTLEFIELDS

FROM THE INFAMOUS TRENCHES OF FLANDERS FIELDS TO THE LESSER-KNOWN EASTERN AND ITALIAN FRONTS, EXPLORE THE REMAINS OF FIRST WORLD WAR BATTLEFIELDS



PRZEMYSL

Tour the ring of forts surrounding the city stronghold

Location: Przemysl, Poland
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Polish zloty

Within weeks of the war beginning, a Russian invasion of East Galicia left the fortress town of Przemysl an isolated Austro-Hungarian island in enemy territory. Constantly bombarded and slowly starving, the garrison stood firm behind seven lines of defence until it surrendered after six months. At one stage more than 40 distinct forts surrounded the city; remnants of many survive in the woods despite attempts to destroy them prior to the surrender. Don't miss the main square, in which sits a statue of The Good Soldier Švejk, hero of the anti-war satirical novel by Czech writer Jaroslav Hašek.

TRENCH OF DEATH

See how the Great War descended into the slog of trench warfare

Location: Diksmuide, Belgium
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

The Battle of the Yser was one of a number of engagements in late 1914 that saw Germany's initial swift advance stopped. Soon after, both sides dug defensive positions and the war slipped into the attrition of trench warfare. Not only was this corner of Belgium one of the first to have trenches dug, it was one of the first to be preserved and opened to the public after the war in 1919. Now sporting a new multimedia visitor centre, the highlight of the Trench of Death remains the 400 metres of concreted trenches depicting the Belgian and German front lines.

SANCTUARY WOOD

Experience the grubby conditions of the Western Front

Location: Ypres, Belgium
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

The Ypres Salient – a peninsula of Allied territory jutting into the German lines – was a focal point of heavy fighting throughout four years of war. After the armistice, the farmer who owned a parcel of land in and around Sanctuary Wood left the British trenches he discovered largely untouched. The ground can get boggy and the corrugated iron can be sharp, but such discomforts make the experience a little closer to that of the Tommies who fought here more than a century ago. The ragtag museum on site includes hundreds of artefacts and pieces of equipment pulled from Sanctuary Wood's soil.

ANZAC COVE

Walk the beach where one of the war's greatest failures occurred

Location: Gallipoli, Turkey
Time zone: UTC+3 **Currency:** Turkish lira

The Gallipoli Campaign began at Anzac Cove, which was named after the soldiers of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps who waded ashore here on the night of 25 April 1915. The amphibious landing on the Gallipoli peninsula led to eight months of fighting before a humiliating retreat. Although there have been few attempts to preserve the sites of battle in Turkey compared to the Western Front, Anzac Cove is part of a national park which has limited development. It's possible to walk the now-peaceful sands where soldiers fought and died a century ago; those seeking more historical context should head to the Canakkale Epic Presentation Centre at nearby Kabatepe.

Image source: Pixabay

VIMY RIDGE

Walk across no-man's land in the footsteps of long-lost soldiers

Location: Vimy, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

There is plenty to explore at the 100-hectare Canadian National Vimy Memorial, although areas are still out of bounds due to the risk of unexploded ordnance. Preserved trenches, shored up with concrete to prevent weather damage, indicate the position of Canadian and German front lines during the Battle of Arras and the surprisingly narrow stretch of no-man's land between them. The vast Vimy Memorial commemorates all Canadians who fought in the war, with several smaller memorials and cemeteries surrounding it. Don't miss going underground into the wartime tunnels dug beneath the trenches – each tour is led by a knowledgeable Canadian student guide.

Image source: Pixabay

Image source: Alamy

NEWFOUNDLAND MEMORIAL PARK

Visit the parkland that saw mass slaughter in July 1916

Location: Beaumont-Hamel, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

One of the largest areas of preserved trenches on the Western Front is dedicated to the Newfoundland Regiment, which occupied a section of the lines outside the village of Beaumont-Hamel during the Battle of the Somme but was almost wiped out in the first 30 minutes of the attack. The trenches are grassed over and partly filled in, but the Canadian and German lines can be easily traced, as can the no-man's land over which the doomed soldiers advanced. A number of memorials and four cemeteries can be found within the 30-hectare site, as well as a helpful visitor centre to help understand the large battlefield.

Around 700 German soldiers died in an accidental fire that ripped through Fort Douaumont on May 8, 1916. This chapel in the fort is in their memory

Image source: Eric T Gunther

FORT DOUAUMONT

Explore the defensive position handed to Germany without a fight

Location: Verdun, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Although it was only constructed in 1890, the sunken fortification at Douaumont was thought to be incapable of resisting German howitzers and was abandoned to a small raiding party in early 1916. That didn't stop the Germans making use of it as a valuable defensive position, a constant pain in the side of the French Army throughout the Battle of Verdun. Largely unchanged since 1918, three floors of the fort are accessible for visitors to see the guns and turrets that held up the French, and the barrack rooms and command posts where the German soldiers were garrisoned.

ESSEX FARM

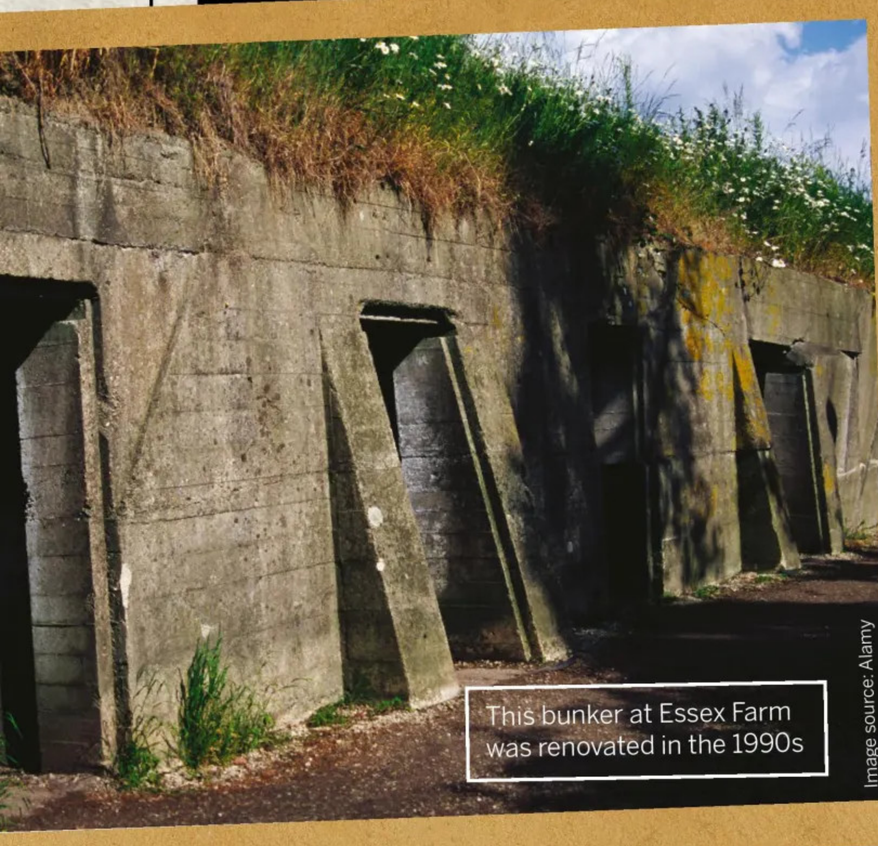
Seek poetic inspiration in Flanders fields

Location: Ypres, Belgium
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Situated behind the front line trenches of the Ypres Salient were the support facilities necessary to keep the troops fighting. It was in one of these, Essex Farm dressing station, that battlefield doctor Major John McCrae composed his famous poem *In Flanders Fields* as the carnage of the Second Battle of Ypres unfolded around him. The surviving concrete bunkers date to later in the war but still give an impression of the cramped facilities that McCrae and his medical colleagues worked in, while the adjoining military cemetery is a sad reminder that they were often unsuccessful in saving the lives of the wounded.

Deborah is displayed in a bare concrete room designed to resemble a bunker on the Hindenburg Line

Image source: Alamy



This bunker at Essex Farm was renovated in the 1990s

Image source: Alamy

CAMBRAI

See the weapon that broke the deadlock in the trenches

Location: Cambrai, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Tanks – the new technology that helped to end the stalemate of trench warfare – were first shown to be effective at the Battle of Cambrai, where the unwieldy and unreliable machines nevertheless overcame the German defences. Although the Cambrai battlefield is not well preserved compared to others on the Western Front, it is possible to see Deborah – a British Mark IV tank – in the Cambrai Tank 1917 Museum. The last known tank of 400 that took part in the battle, Deborah was rescued from a landfill site in 1998 and is now displayed next door to the cemetery in which her four crewmen are buried. Plan your visit carefully as the museum is closed from 1 December to 14 March.

Image source: Hispalois

LOCHNAGAR CRATER

See a mighty scar from the Battle of the Somme

Location: La Boisselle, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Two minutes before British troops were ordered over the top to begin the Battle of the Somme, a series of huge mines that had been secretly tunnelled under German lines were detonated. The Lochnagar mine explosion was reportedly heard in London and left a crater 30 metres deep and 100 metres wide. Now one of the biggest scars remaining on the landscape of the Western Front, Lochnagar Crater is an excellent place to ponder the mass slaughter on the first day of the Somme – despite the huge explosion, the fighting around the crater led to one of the highest concentrations of casualties across the battlefield.

GREAT WAR THEME PARK

Hike through the front lines of the Italian Front

Location: Monfalcone, Italy
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro

The soldiers of the Italian and Austro-Hungarian armies who fought over the border of their respective nations didn't just have the horrors of trench warfare to contend with – they also had to deal with freezing Alpine winters. The preserved remains of this theatre of war can be found in the incongruously named Great War Theme Park on the hillside behind Monfalcone. The best hiking routes to take in the trenches and artillery positions spread across four square kilometres are set out in three well-signposted trails; the historical remains have enlightening information boards explaining what can be seen.

Image source: Alamy

HMS Caroline was moored in Belfast in 1922 but not decommissioned from the Royal Navy until 2011

HMS CAROLINE

Climb aboard the last survivor of the Battle of Jutland

Location: Belfast, UK
Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling

Only one ship is still afloat from the war's major sea battle. HMS Caroline, moored in Belfast's Titanic Quarter, was opened to the public as a floating museum in 2016 to mark the centenary of the Battle of Jutland. A dramatic film tells the story of the battle, while several areas of the ship are presented as they would have been during the war, including the captain's quarters, engine rooms, galley and sick bay. The mess deck offers modern refreshments, although unlike the sailors who manned the ship at Jutland, you won't be offered a daily tot of rum.

Image source: Alan Wilson

WORLD WAR I MEMORIALS

The unprecedented carnage of the First World War led to a wave of memorials and monuments to commemorate the loss of a generation

ST SYMPHORIEN MILITARY CEMETERY

Pay your respects to the first and last casualties

Location: Saint-Symphorien, Belgium
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

A moving illustration of the futility of the First World War, the military cemetery in the small village of St Symphorien holds the bodies of the first and last British soldiers killed in action – although their deaths occurred within just a few miles of each other, they were separated by four years of slaughter. It is also the last resting place of Private George Price, a Canadian, who was killed by a sniper's bullet at 10.58 on the morning of 11 November 1918, failing to see out the conflict by just two minutes.

Image source: Wernervc

Image source: Jean-Pol Grandmont

MENIN GATE

Experience the moving Last Post ceremony

Location: Ypres, Belgium **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Millions of soldiers passed through Ypres' Menenpoort, or Menin Gate, on their way to fight in one of several battles that ruined the Belgian town during the First World War. Some 300,000 of them were killed. The names of more than 50,000 of the British and Commonwealth soldiers with no identified grave are inscribed on the Menin Gate, which was rebuilt as a memorial in 1927. Every evening, the road that runs through the mausoleum is briefly closed to allow buglers to sound The Last Post. Visitors to Flanders Fields should make attending the touching ceremony a priority.

Image source: Getty

Image source: Pixabay

TYNE COT

Be moved by the scale of Britain's biggest war cemetery

Location: Passendale, Belgium **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

So great was the number of deaths in the trenches that the British authorities decided to bury the bodies of fallen soldiers close to where they fell rather than repatriating them. Under the aegis of the Imperial War Graves Commission, soldiers were interred under uniform gravestones with no distinction for rank or class. The largest British cemetery is Tyne Cot, which is the last resting place of almost 12,000 soldiers who died in the Ypres Salient. Although every one of the war cemeteries is a poignant place, the sheer scale of loss is brought into focus in Tyne Cot's seemingly endless rows of identical headstones.

Image source: Pixabay

Image source: GaryBlakeley

THIEPVAL MEMORIAL

Read the endless lists of lost soldiers

Location: Picardy, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Fifty metres above the cemetery that adjoins it, the Thiepval Memorial is a complex monument of intersecting arches. Its intricate design was necessary to create enough space to display the names of 72,000 soldiers with no known grave. Although the soldiers were lost in battles in the area throughout the war, such was the devastation in the five months of the Battle of the Somme that 90% of the names derive from that action alone. An unobtrusive visitor centre and museum places the memorial in context without disturbing the sombre atmosphere of the site.

Image source: Benjot

Image source: Pixabay

POPERINGE DEATH CELLS

Explore military discipline at its most brutal

Location: Poperinge, Belgium
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Most British soldiers saw 'Good old Pop' as a town in which they could get some well-needed rest behind the lines, but for an unlucky few it was the last place they saw. In the basement of the town hall are two cells in which deserters – many of whom would have been suffering from shell-shock – spent their last night before being shot at dawn. In the yard, a post to which the condemned men were tied is surrounded by a simple memorial. Don't miss the heart-rending graffiti carved by the soldiers killed by their own side.

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Alamy

CANNOCK CHASE GERMAN MILITARY CEMETERY

Pay your respects to those buried in enemy territory

Location: Staffordshire, UK
Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling

Not all soldiers died in the trenches. For some, death came while they were incarcerated in enemy territory. In 1959, the British and German governments agreed to transfer most bodies of German prisoners who'd died in British hospitals or prison camps to a single, well-maintained site.

The immaculate rows of graves are treated with the same respect as those in the nearby Commonwealth War Cemetery. British and German soldiers may have fought each other a century ago, but they're treated equally in death.

Image source: Nabokov

Image source: Getty

GLADE OF THE ARMISTICE

Stand where the Great War came to an end

Location: Compiegne Forest, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

The carnage of the First World War eventually came to an end in a railway carriage of Marshal Foch's personal train, deep in the Compiegne Forest to shield the momentous event from journalists. There, on 11 November 1918, a German delegation signed an armistice agreement. The French government made the site into a national monument, erecting a statue of Foch and the Alsace-Lorraine Memorial, but in 1940 the Nazis destroyed most of the site as they saw it as a humiliating reminder of past defeats, although not before making the French sign their own surrender at the same spot. The French government later rebuilt the memorial.

Image source: TCY

Image source: Getty

THE CENOTAPH

See Britain's national site of commemoration

Location: London, UK
Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling

The Cenotaph was originally a temporary wooden structure erected on Whitehall for a victory parade in 1919, but the base of the monument was buried underneath floral tributes left by the British people for weeks afterwards and the decision was soon made to replace it with a permanent replica constructed from Portland stone. Now the site of national commemoration at the annual Remembrance Day services, the simple but iconic monument dedicated to 'The Glorious Dead' is a raised, empty tomb representing all those who have died in service, although it is unfortunately marooned in the middle of a busy road.

Image source: POA(Phot) Mez Merrill/MOD

Image source: Andrew Shiva / Wikipedia / CC BY-SA 4.0

WORLD WAR II BATTLEFIELDS

EXPLORE THE SITES OF VICTORY, DEFEAT AND DEVASTATION DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

WORCESTER TELEGRAM 2nd INVASION EXTRA

WORCESTER, MASS., TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 6, 1944

6 PAGES — FOUR CENTS

INVASION BEGINS ON NORTH FRENCH COAST

First Beachheads Established; Drive 10 Miles Inland; Landings Reported Between Le Havre and Cherbourg

FIRST BLOW BY PARATROOPERS

'Monty' Leads Allied Troops

Image source: Getty

Image source: National Archives and Records Administration

Image source: Getty

STALINGRAD

The Red Army triumphed over the Nazison the Volga

Location: Volga Region, Southern Russia
Time zone: UTC+4 **Currency:** Russian ruble

Mamayev Kurgan, crowned by the immense statue The Motherland Calls, towers above the Russian city of Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad, where the Soviet Red Army inflicted a major defeat on the invading Nazi war machine, turning the tide of World War II in the East. Stalingrad, situated on the River Volga, was the scene of more than five months of bitter, desperate fighting. The Soviets suffered more than a million casualties, and Germany and its co-belligerents lost nearly as many. Numerous sites are preserved around the city, and the memorial complex includes a solemn yet stirring sculpture bearing an eternal flame.

Image source: www.volganet.ru

The Motherland Calls rises 85 metres (279 feet) atop the heights of Mamayev Kurgan in the city of Volgograd

Image source: Supercarwaar

The remains of a former German coastal battery in Normandy, silenced in the fighting on D-Day, invite exploration

NORMANDY

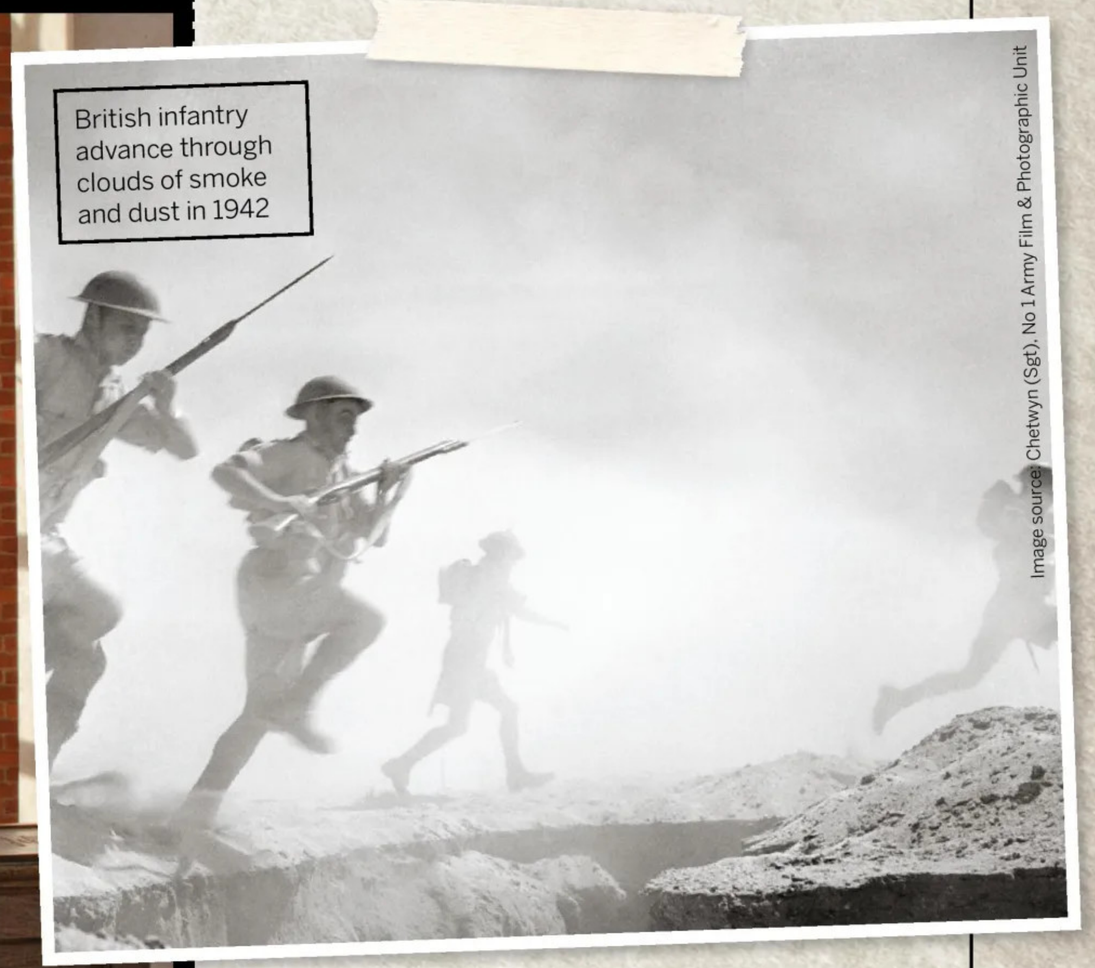
Revered sites of D-Day and the Normandy Campaign attract thousands

Location: Normandy, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

The turning point of World War II in the West famously occurred on 6 June 1944, when 150,000 Allied soldiers assaulted five landing beaches in French Normandy, initiating the campaign that hastened the end of Hitler's Nazi regime and liberated much of Europe from oppressive military occupation. Operation Overlord was a vast undertaking involving Allied forces on land, sea and air. The beaches and battlefields where the liberation effort began are well preserved and memorialised, and the final resting places of the thousands of Allied soldiers who gave their lives for victory are locations of beauty and reverence not to be missed.

Image source: Wernervc

The solemn cemetery at Dunkirk is the final resting place for many soldiers who died during the fighting in 1940



British infantry advance through clouds of smoke and dust in 1942

Image source: Chetwyn (Sgt), No 1 Army Film & Photographic Unit

EL ALAMEIN

The British desert victory in 1942 was a turning point in WWII

Location: Mediterranean coast, Western Egypt
Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Egyptian pound

In October 1942, the British Eighth Army, commanded by General Bernard Law Montgomery, inflicted a major defeat on the vaunted German Panzerarmee Afrika under General Erwin Rommel, remembered as the Desert Fox. Rommel's string of victories in North Africa came to an end at this somewhat remote railroad whistle stop, and from that time his command was in retreat across hundreds of miles of desert. By May 1943, the Axis presence on the African continent was eliminated, and El Alamein is recognised as the turning point in the Desert War. Day trips by rail from Alexandria, Egypt, 74 miles northeast, are popular with tourists.

Image source: Leon Petrosyan

Image source: DoD by PH3(AW/SW) JAYME PASTORIC, USN

PEARL HARBOR

Japan's attack plunged the United States into World War II

Location: Honolulu, Hawaii
Time zone: UTC-10 **Currency:** US dollar

On Sunday 7 December 1941, a tenuous peace was shattered as Japanese aircraft attacked the US Pacific Fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor and other military installations on the island of Oahu in the territory of Hawaii. The fleet was devastated and 2,403 Americans died. The USS Arizona Memorial, accessible by motor launch, is a poignant reminder of the tremendous loss of life that occurred when the battleship exploded. An extensive visitors' centre presents the story of Pearl Harbor, and other sites – including the battleship USS Missouri, where the Japanese surrender occurred in 1945 – are open for tours and historical interpretation.

DUNKIRK

Thousands of Allied fighting personnel were evacuated in 1940

Location: Dunkirk, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Operation Dynamo, the 'Miracle of Dunkirk', occurred in 1940 as thousands of soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and its French allies were surrounded by the invading Nazis at the port city on the English Channel. The Royal Navy and civilian volunteers organised a fleet that sailed across the Channel and rescued more than 300,000 soldiers who would otherwise have become prisoners of war. Visitors may walk the beach, contemplate the heroic evacuation effort, and learn the story of Operation Dynamo, where the BEF escaped to fight the Nazis another day in a stirring chapter of World War II heroism.

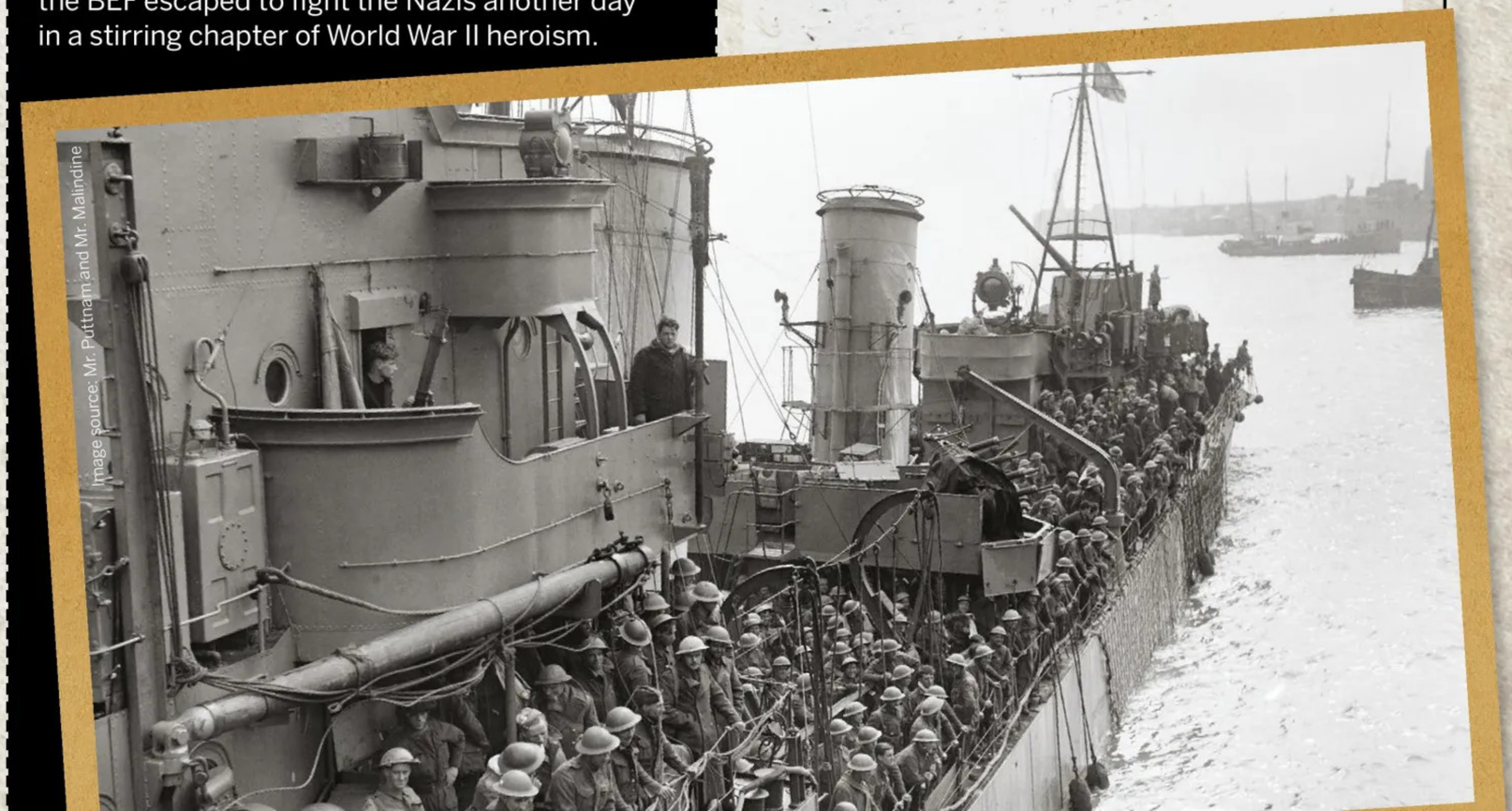


Image source: Mr. Puttnam and Mr. Malindine

MONTE CASSINO

The famed abbey was bombed to rubble and then rebuilt

Location: Tyrrhenian Sea, South-central Italy
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

The fighting at Monte Cassino in 1943 was some of the most savage to take place during the entire Italian Campaign. Ancient and modern history blend there today to tell the story of the tenacious German defence of the road to Rome and the ultimate Allied victory that led to the liberation of the Eternal City in June 1944. During the fighting, the ancient Abbey of Monte Cassino was destroyed when American bombers dropped 1,400 tons of high explosives. However, the rubble was then occupied and became a defensive stronghold for the Germans. Allied troops also fought their way along the highway below. The abbey was reconstructed after the war.

The reconstructed Abbey of Monte Cassino lies above the road to Rome, bitterly contested in World War II

Image source: Radomił

GUADALCANAL

US forces stopped the Japanese in the Solomon Islands

Location: Solomon Islands, South Pacific
Time zone: UTC+11
Currency: Solomon Islands dollar

The island of Guadalcanal in the Solomons chain in the South Pacific was the scene of a six-month struggle between Japanese and American forces. They were fighting for control of its vital airfield, which would allow the victor to dominate a vast area in all directions. US Marines and Army troops secured the island in February 1943, halting Japanese territorial expansion after bitter fights to protect Henderson Field, along the banks of the Ilu River, at Bloody Ridge, and elsewhere. The town of Honiara, population centre of the island, was built after World War II, but numerous battle sites and a solemn memorial remain.

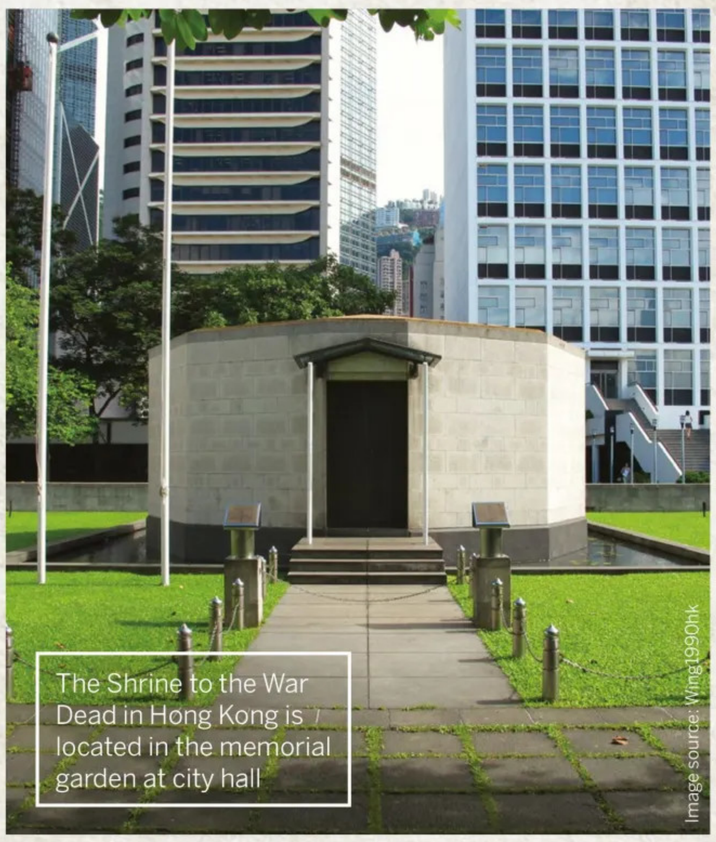
Image source: American Battle Monuments Commission

HONG KONG

Japanese forces captured the city of Hong Kong in 1941

Location: Hong Kong, Southern China
Time zone: UTC+8 **Currency:** Hong Kong dollar

During the early days of World War II in the Pacific, Japanese forces were victorious on all fronts. Flush with victory, they assaulted British and Commonwealth troops defending the bastion of the Crown Colony at Hong Kong. The city fell to the Japanese on Christmas Day, 1941, following a heroic defence. Many sites that were prominent during the struggle are preserved today and accessible via guided walking tours of about a half day's duration. Sites to explore include the Stanley area, where Europeans concentrated, numerous buildings that date from the World War II period and fortifications of the Gin Drinkers' Line.



The Shrine to the War Dead in Hong Kong is located in the memorial garden at city hall

Image source: Wing1990hk

Image source: Marcin Białek

WARSAW

The Polish capital was the scene of heroic resistance

Location: Warsaw, Poland
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Polish złoty

Warsaw, the beautiful capital of Poland, was devastated by the Nazi invasion that opened World War II in Europe in 1939. The city endured occupation, and its Jewish population was rounded up and segregated in the Ghetto, where the suffering was immense. Terrorised, starved and often deported to death camps, the Jews rose up against their Nazi oppressors in 1943 and waged a heroic battle. In 1944, the people of Warsaw revolted against Nazi rule once again, defending themselves against long odds while the Soviet Red Army stood idle. Today, vestiges of that dark chapter in the city's history are alive again with remembrance.

Image source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-J28477

The Mardasson Memorial in Bastogne is one of many tributes to soldiers of the Battle of the Bulge located in the Ardennes

Image source: Jean-Pol Grandmont

BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Hitler's Ardennes Offensive in the winter of 1944 nearly succeeded

Location: Ardennes region of Belgium, Luxembourg and France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Early on 16 December 1944, German tanks and troops attacked the thinly held American line in the Ardennes Forest and drove toward the Belgian port city of Antwerp. Initially the assault, Hitler's desperate gamble for a decisive victory in the West, appeared promising as the German Panzer spearheads stabbed toward crossings of the River Meuse. However, stubborn American resistance and resilience eventually blunted the German thrust, turning the tables in the largest battle of World War II in the West. Numerous sites in Belgium, Luxembourg and France, particularly the Belgian crossroads town of Bastogne, still bear the scars of the conflict.

Image source: Getty

TARAWA

US Marines learned hard lessons on the island of Tarawa

Location: Republic of Kiribati, Central Pacific
Time zone: UTC+12 **Currency:** Kiribati dollar

The capital of the Republic of Kiribati, the atoll of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, was the scene of the first contested amphibious landing conducted by US Marines against Japanese defenders in World War II. The carnage was terrific as 1,009 Americans died and the garrison of Tarawa was virtually wiped out with more than 4,600 dead in the November 1943 battle. The Japanese fought tenaciously from concrete bunkers and machine-gun nests, but the Marines prevailed, enduring murderous fire on the beaches, and subdued Tarawa in 76 hours. Vestiges of the savage battle are scattered across the atoll, and tours are available.

Image source: U.S. Department of Defense Current Photos

IWO JIMA

After a month's fighting, US Marines successfully secured Iwo Jima

Location: Volcano Islands, Pacific Ocean
Time zone: UTC+9 **Currency:** Japanese yen

Iwo Jima, located in Japan's Volcano Islands, saw 6,800 Americans lose their lives, while Japanese losses totalled more than 18,000. The small island, located just 650 miles from the Japanese capital of Tokyo, was heavily defended by entrenched troops willing to fight to the death. During the February 1945 battle, American Marines reached the summit of Mount Suribachi, an extinct volcano at the southern tip of the island, and raised their flag, resulting in the most iconic image of World War II in the Pacific. Iwo Jima remains remote today, and comforts are few. However, for those who venture there, the experience is memorable.

Image source: Joe Rosenthal

WORLD WAR II MEMORIALS

One of the most defining moments in human history, World War II has been immortalised across the planet, a tale of horror, adversity and hope

MAMAYEV KURGAN

The epic monument to the world's greatest battle

Location: Volgograd, Russia
Time zone: UTC+4
Currency: Russian ruble

Dedicated to the Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad (now called Volgograd), this epic memorial complex commemorates the world's largest ever land battle. Built in 1959, it rises 820 metres up a flight of steps, ramps and squares, decorated by sculptures that tell the story of the battle. The largest and bloodiest battle in human history, it involved millions of participants, killing 800,000 Axis soldiers and more than 1 million Soviets in just six months. Among the monuments is the staggering statue The Motherland Calls!, a colossal female figure representing the spirit of the motherland, defiantly raising a sword in her hand, ready to turn the tide of the Eastern Front.

Image source: Alamy

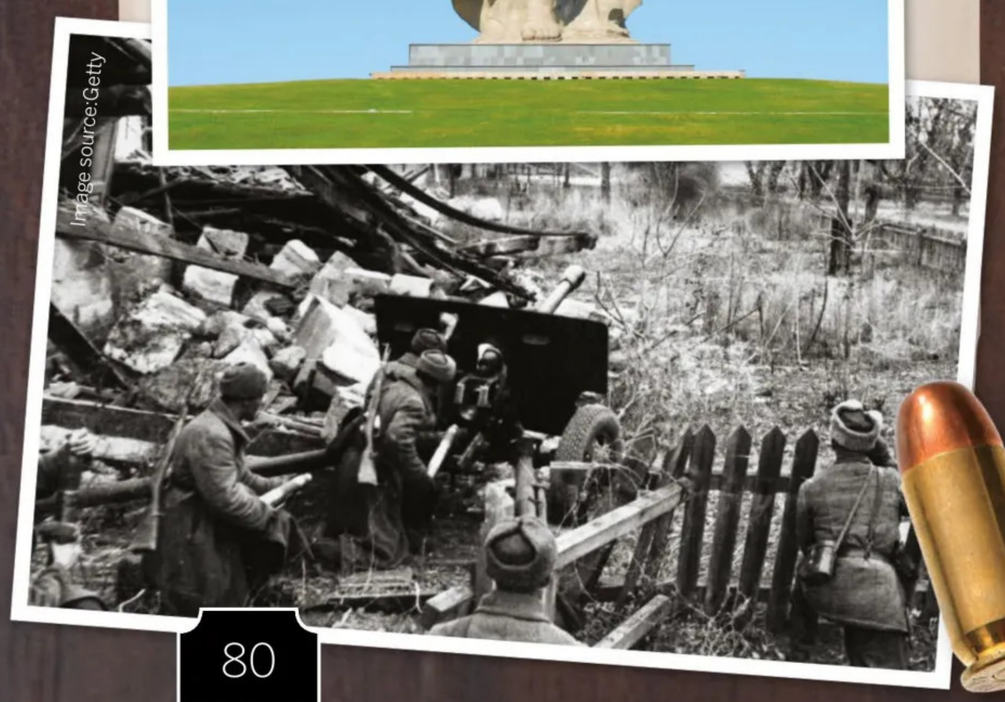


Image source: Getty

STOCKPORT AIR RAID SHELTERS

A trip back to the Blitz

Location: Stockport, UK
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Pound sterling

On 7 September 1941, as World War II grew into total warfare, the Germans kicked off their campaign of the sustained bombing of Britain, known as the Blitz. In the ensuing two years, almost 45,000 British citizens would be killed. London famously bore the brunt of the campaign, but in Manchester alone more than 8,000 homes were destroyed, alongside the city's industrial zones and landmarks. In Stockport, the British built their largest civilian air raid shelter, capable of protecting 6,500 people. Carved into sandstone cliffs, the mile-long tunnel network gives visitors an insight into life during the Blitz.

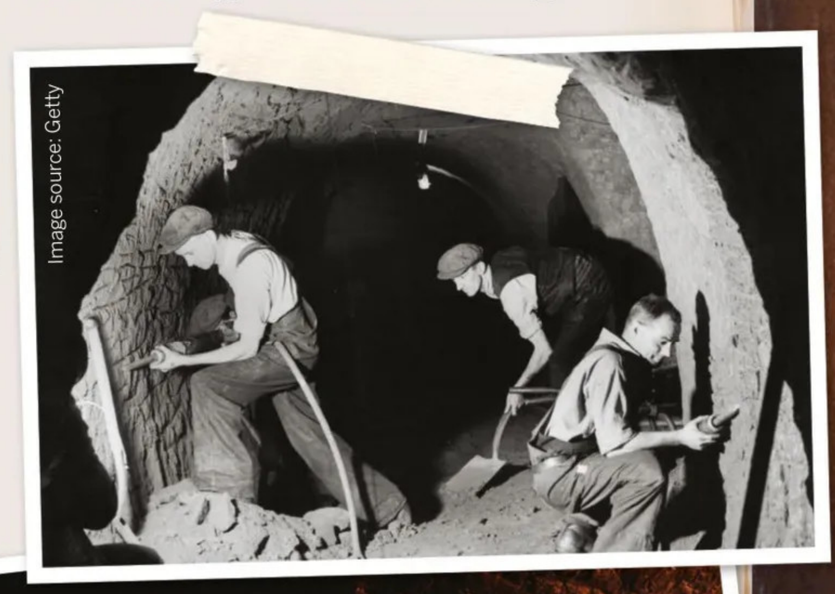


Image source: Getty

Image source: Alamy

RYOZEN KANNON

Japan's monument to the universal soldier

Location: Kyoto, Japan **Time zone:** UTC+9
Currency: Japanese yen

Tucked within Kyoto's historic Higashiyama District, a large white statue, 24 metres high, dominates the skyline, over the trees. Depicting the Bodhisattva Kannon, or the Goddess of Mercy, the memorial sits behind a reflecting pool, which is filled with lotus blossoms in the summer. Opened in 1955, it eulogises not only the millions of Japanese who died in World War II, but the universal unknown soldier. Alongside its Buddhist-style gardens is a chapel, with drawers full of the names of Allied prisoners of war who died in Japanese territories, as well as an altar holding soil from all the Allied cemeteries in the Pacific theatre.

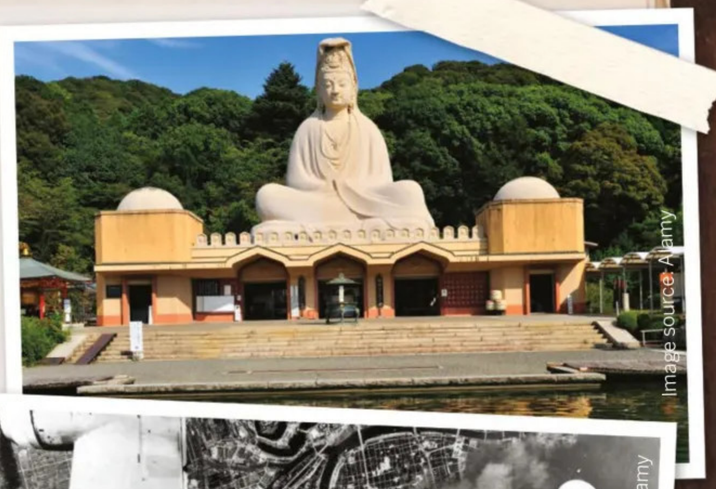


Image source: Alamy

Image source: Alamy

WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

Remembering the Americans who lived and died through WWII

Location: Washington, DC, USA
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** US dollar

Image source: Thinkstock

Commemorating the 16 million who served the US armed forces during WWII, the country's national memorial was dedicated in 2004, not just to those on the front lines, but to those who supported at home, too. It stands as a testament to the values of liberty and unity, in the face of the defining event of the 20th century. Sitting between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, it features 24 bronze panels, joined by 56 stone pillars – linked with sculpted rope – representing each of the US states and territories of the time. They encircle a pool, joined by a wall of 4,084 gold stars symbolising the 400,000 Americans who were killed. The memorial also boasts a searchable database of all the Americans who aided the war effort.

RATS OF TOBRUK MEMORIAL

Australia's monument commemorating a lesser-known Allied North African adventure

Location: Canberra, Australia
Time zone: UTC+10
Currency: Australian dollar

Image source: Peter Ellis

Image source: Getty

From April to December 1941, 14,000 Australian soldiers – alongside British, Indian, Czechoslovakian, Polish and other Allied troops – endured an eight-month siege of Tobruk, in Libya, desperately keeping the port out of Nazi hands. Surrounded and outnumbered by Germans and Italians, they were barraged by tanks, artillery, bombs and the scorching heat every day, hiding in caves and dug-outs. For their defiant refusal to yield, they were affectionately nicknamed the 'Rats of Tobruk', mocking a derogatory remark broadcasted over Nazi radio. They were finally relieved by a fleet of sailors, who navigated through aircraft, mines and submarines to get there. The Rats of Tobruk Memorial immortalises the epic struggle to stall the Afrika Korps' North African campaign.

MONUMENT TO THE GHETTO HEROES

How a group of Jews fought to the death rather than accept their fates

Location: Warsaw, Poland **Time zone:** UTC+2
Currency: Polish złoty

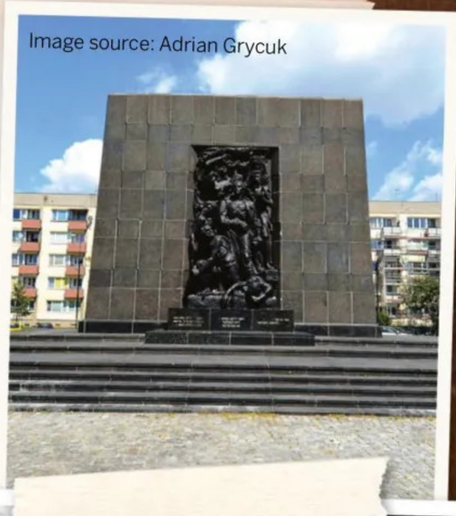


Image source: Adrian Grycuk

Image source: Alamy

The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes was opened in 1948 on the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The rebellion broke out in 1942, after Jews in the ghetto learnt the Nazis had already sent 300,000 Jews to the Treblinka death camp and planned to round up the remaining 60,000. Rather than acquiesce, the Jewish Fighting Organisation formed, led by a 23-year-old who smuggled in weapons. In 1943, they fired on the Nazis who were rounding up Jews, prompting the Germans to send in 2,000 soldiers, armed with tanks and flamethrowers. Though outnumbered, the 750 lightly armed Jewish fighters resisted for almost a month before being killed or sent to the camp.

BUBANJ MEMORIAL PARK

Remembering the Serbian spirit of defiance, and the scale of Nazi atrocity

Location: Nis, Serbia **Time zone:** UTC+1
Currency: Serbian dinar

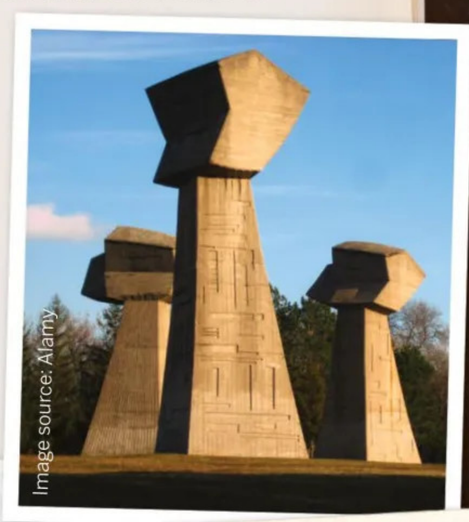


Image source: Alamy

Image source: Alamy

This Serbian memorial marks the site where up to 12,000 Serbs, Jews and Romanis were rounded up and killed by Nazi forces from 1942 to 1944. It was originally a prison camp, but, after a group of 105 broke out, the guards began killing at random. They made their victims dig trenches, essentially their own graves, and executed them under the cloak of night. The memorial park features an array of trails, accompanied by monuments symbolising the war, the dead and Serbian resistance. Atop a hill, at its heart, stark fists thrust heavenward, monuments of defiance in the face of the ultimate indignity.

THE NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM

America's National World War II museum is an experiential treasure trove

Location: New Orleans, USA
Time zone: UTC-6 **Currency:** US dollar

Image source: Alamy

America's National World War II Museum outlines the events and nature of the war, told not just through the battles and driving personalities, but the everyday lives of ordinary civilians. With an array of immersive exhibits and galleries, it outlines the American experience of the war – how it was fought, what it was like and its enduring legacy. From the US to Europe, and the Pacific theatre, the museum houses 250,000 artefacts and more than 9,000 personal accounts of the war, alongside numerous online resources, virtual field trips, webinars and educational travel programmes.

Image source: Thinkstock

HIROSHIMA

THE SITE OF THE WORLD'S FIRST NUCLEAR ATTACK, HIROSHIMA TODAY STANDS AS A TESTAMENT TO WORLD PEACE

The 6 August 1945 began like any other day. With Japan the only remaining Axis power left in World War II, air raid sirens had become commonplace. However, this day would be unlike any other in history, one of horror and anguish hitherto unknown.

At 8.15am, for a moment, it was as though the earth froze and Hell's gates themselves had been hurled open. With a blinding flash, the world's first nuclear bomb had been dropped over Hiroshima. The bomb unleashed a four-square-kilometre firestorm, raging at 7,000 degrees Celcius, vaporising tens of thousands of civilians and incinerating buildings, followed by a supersonic blast, smashing tens of thousands more to pieces at wind speeds of 440 metres per second.

The luckiest victims died immediately, their shadows burned into the steps. However, with 13-square-kilometres of city destroyed, some were less fortunate. In the aftermath, children crawled around, searching for their parents, and parents for their children, only to find swarms of half-dead survivors wandering aimlessly down the street, muttering, their flesh hanging from their bodies. Others, burned black, leaped into the river, desperately trying in vain to ease their blistering pain, or simply perished beneath burning buildings.

Above: Many of the survivors who did not succumb to burns later developed cancer and leukaemia, with two thirds of survivors dying of cancer to this day

In the subsequent days and months, many more fell victim to their burns. By the end of the year, up to 166,000 people had died – suffering awful, lingering deaths, with maggots laying eggs in their wounds. Among the survivors, many developed keloids – made famous by the 'Hiroshima Maidens'. Moreover, exposure to radiation and fallout led to a spike in leukaemia among children, beginning just two years later. Cancer rates also skyrocketed, with two thirds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors eventually dying of the disease, to this day.

Insert image source: Shunkichi Kikuchi

Hiroshima has since made a miraculous recovery from the unthinkable, boasting a unique cosmopolitan vibe. At its heart is the Peace Memorial Park – centred around the Genbaku Dome, or A-Bomb Dome. Built in 1914 and designed by a Czech architect, it was somewhat of an anomaly among the city's traditional, wooden buildings. Before the war it was used to promote and showcase prefectural products, until being converted to a government building. Sitting just beneath the epicentre of the bomb, it was the only building left standing for miles. The UNESCO site has since been preserved at its post-War state, a crumbling grey shell of its former self; where lumps of metal jut from concrete and brick – the very embodiment of nuclear apocalypse.

Elsewhere, the Peace Memorial Museum documents the history of the city before and after the atom bomb, outlining the devastating human cost through the lives of its individual victims. The dead are memorialised at the stoic Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims, an arched monument designed to house and shelter their souls. Built before the city's reconstruction, it contains an ever-growing registry of more than 300,000 victims. Another memorial stands in recognition of the tens of thousands of Korean victims, who had been relocated to the city for forced labour.

As the events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki closed the doors on World War II, they ushered in an era of profound fear; the era of mutually assured destruction. In this dangerous new world, man held the keys to his undoing. As nations continue to flirt with the ultimate danger, one visit to Hiroshima is all it takes to disavow all war forever. Despite its past horrors, the city has been turned into a symbol of hope – a place where elderly pacifists gather signatures, and children sing gentle songs, to celebrate the sanctity of life, and the dream of peace.

Top, left: The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum tells the stories of the individuals affected by the bomb, as depicted by a child's drawing

Top, right: The arched Cenotaph commemorates the victims of both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atom bombs, with a registry of more than 300,000 victims

Above: In the wake of tragedy, Hiroshima has become a centre of hope and pacifism, a testament to the horrors of war

THE PAPER CRANES OF HIROSHIMA

How a young girl's struggle inspired an international peace movement

Among the various monuments scattered around the Peace Memorial Park is an arched pedestal, nine metres high, topped by a bronze statue of a young girl holding a wireframe crane over her head, joined by suspended figures of another boy and girl. Beneath, a bronze crane hangs like a windchime, over a stone, inscribed with: "This is our cry. This is our prayer. For building peace in this world."

The monument is a testament to the child victims of the atom bomb – perhaps best embodied by a young girl called Sadako Sasaki. Having survived the bomb unscathed, eight years later, aged just ten, Sadako was hospitalised with leukaemia. While there, the hospital was sent a number of paper cranes as get-well soon gifts for patients. According to Japanese folklore, folding 1,000 paper cranes entitled a person to one wish. Hoping to recover to see a world free of nuclear weapons, Sadako began making her own out of whatever she could get her hands on. Though she only managed to craft 644, her classmates completed the remaining 356, so that she was buried with all 1,000.

The paper crane remains a symbol of peace in Hiroshima, and people across the world continue to donate cranes to the site in honour of Sadako and her fellow victims.

Right: Paper cranes remain a symbol of peace and hope at Hiroshima, thanks to the legacy of Sadako Sasaki

Image source: Alamy

VIETNAM WAR

HAVING SURVIVED ONE OF THE BLOODIEST, NEEDLESS AND MOST PROTRACTED WARS OF THE 20TH CENTURY, VIETNAM HAS EMERGED WITH A CAUTIONARY TALE

In 1954, after eight years of fighting, the communist leader Ho Chi Minh finally put an end to the near-century of exploitative French colonial rule in Vietnam. Later, as the communist North Vietnamese Viet Cong pushed south, the Americans staged a false flag attack in 1964 as a precursor to military action – eventually launching a full-on invasion.

In the subsequent decade-long war the US would drop three-times as many bombs as it did during World War II, only to withdraw with nothing to show for its 58,000 dead soldiers, and millions of dead Vietnamese – including hundreds of thousands of civilians.

To the Americans the war was an attempt to contain the threat of communism in Southeast Asia. To the Vietnamese, who had endured a century of suffering beneath the French and then Japanese, it was the latest in a string of foreign occupations – one that it would fight to the last man.

Above: Ho Chi Minh's remains rest in a mausoleum in Hanoi

Even with Soviet and Chinese backing, the Vietnamese had to be resourceful. Largely composed of peasants, the army mastered guerilla warfare – hiding in the overgrowth, attacking in brief bursts and then scattering back into the darkness. Tourists today can visit the Viet Cong's tunnel systems, such as Cu Chi, stretching hundreds of kilometres long. Though barely large enough to squeeze through, the Viet Cong not only lived in them, but ran weapons factories and kitchens in the claustrophobic, dangerous networks – a testament to their gritty resolve. Elsewhere, the Vinh Moc tunnels were dug 23 metres underground to protect civilians from American bombs. Linking up with other tunnel systems, they featured a meeting hall for 60 people and even a maternity ward. The guerillas also used them to transport supplies to their comrades on Con Co island.

Guerilla tactics prompted the American use of napalm and chemicals like Agent Orange, used to strip away half the

Insert image source: Lars Curfs

Image source: Getty

Image source: Getty

Image source: Alamy

Above: The US massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai marked a turning point in public opinion towards the war back home

Left: Vietnam's land and its people have been scarred by the American use of Agent Orange

Right: The War Remnants Museum is a post-colonial meditation on the horrors of the Vietnam War, and French occupation

country's forest and disfiguring the locals for generations. The Viet Cong maintained an extensive supply network, running beneath the undergrowth. Stretching from Hanoi to Saigon and weaving intermittently into Laos, the Ho Chi Minh Trail survived intense American bombings – which spilled illegally into Cambodia – and helped arm Viet Cong across the country throughout the war.

After the North Vietnamese launched a surprise attack during the lunar Tet holiday, the city of Hue became the site of one of the war's most protracted battles. American bombs destroyed most of the Imperial City – a place of cultural and religious significance, today designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mass graves found in Hue indicated that the Viet Cong massacred thousands of civilians – seen as loyal to the US – and prisoners of war during the fighting, though some have disputed the number and nature of these deaths. The North Vietnamese lost 5,000 fighters in the combat, compared to just 216 Americans and 400 South Vietnamese – a telling example of their shocking ability to replenish their troops.

The Viet Cong also laid mines, used sniper rifles and built punji stick traps – sharpened bamboo sticks buried in holes, beneath undergrowth. Mostly peasants, they hid among the population, used by American soldiers to justify atrocities such as the massacre at My Lai, where hundreds of civilians were murdered and their village burned down. Today My Lai features a museum, memorialising the massacre and its victims.

A curious landmark to the war's end is the Reunification Hall, formerly the Presidential Palace, where the South Vietnamese president was airlifted out during the Fall of Saigon. Though Ho Chi Minh would die six years shy of this victory, his embalmed body is on display at the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, a fascinating celebration of his life and legacy.

THE WAR REMNANTS MUSEUM

A warning for future generations, the War Remnants Museum recounts the human cost of war, a great attraction for dark tourists

Ho Chi Minh City's War Remnants Museum is a testament to the atrocities suffered by the Vietnamese during the first Indochina War and the Vietnam War. Opened in 1975 as the Exhibition House for US and Puppet Crimes, it was later renamed the Exhibition House for Crimes of War and Aggression before finally being shortened to the War Remnants Museum – reflecting a thaw in relations with the US.

While American visitors criticise the museum's lack of documentation of North Vietnamese war crimes, it recounts the human cost of heavy-handed imperialist wars of aggression in the country. The effects of Agent Orange, which has caused 500,000 children to be born with defects and continues to produce at-risk babies to this day, are on full display, alongside a French guillotine used to behead Viet Nimh nationalists. The museum also showcases the small 'tiger cages' prisoners were kept and tortured in by the South Vietnamese government.

A harrowing journey, it explores the grim nature of the Vietnam War, with a particularly chilling photograph exhibit devoted to the My Lai massacre. It also showcases a wide array of weapons and vehicles used by American forces, among tens of thousands of artefacts.

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Ardfern

THE TROUBLES

UNCOVER THE SITES THAT HAVE MADE NORTHERN IRELAND WHAT IT IS TODAY

The past can be a tricky thing in Northern Ireland. For centuries, tension brewed between Catholics and Protestants, between Loyalists and Republicans, between neighbours and colleagues. In the 1970s, it erupted into something akin to a 20th-century holy war. From the streets of Belfast to the Medieval walls of Derry, there was violence in the form of gangs and car bombs, with two sides facing off against each other. On the one side were those who wanted to be a part of the United Kingdom – the so-called Loyalists – who were mainly Protestants. On the other were the Republicans, their families often coming from the Republic of Ireland, who wanted the island of Ireland to be united once more. Each side lived in different neighbourhoods and attended different schools, and they fought each other in the streets. This was the Troubles.

Many people are put off travelling to Northern Ireland because of the Troubles – they worry about the balaclava-clad men and the car bombs. It probably doesn't help that the history of the country isn't taught much elsewhere in Britain. But except for rare circumstances, the country is as safe to travel to as anywhere else in the United Kingdom, and while it still bears the scars of its not-so-distant past, the locals are more than happy to show you around.

Above: The infamous Free Derry Corner and mural in Bogside, Londonderry/Derry

Below: The Northern Irish flag flies over a Unionist neighbourhood

Belfast should be the first port of call. Of course it's feted as being the building site of the Titanic (if you ask any local, it was built by Irishmen but sunk by Englishmen), but there's plenty to see in and around the city to do with the Troubles. There are two or three sightseeing bus tours that you can hop on and off at your leisure during the day, and they'll take you to (or at least past) the most famous sights. You'll see Stormont House, where the Northern Ireland Assembly sits, as well as the university, but the Troubles sites come later in the tour when you go up the Shankill and down the Falls.

Shankill Road is one of the main roads in west Belfast, but the first thing you'll notice as you drive down it are the Union flags fluttering from windows and poles. The bus will continue on its route until you find yourself on Falls Road, a Republican stronghold, which is clear from the Irish tricolour waving in the wind. It was on these two streets that a considerable amount of fighting took place from the 1970s to the 1990s, with Loyalist and Republican neighbourhoods right next to each other. Between the two

Insert image source: Ardfern

A unique childhood: schoolboys play near a British soldier on the streets of Belfast, 1981

Image source: Getty

Image source: Kilcooleykingbilly

you'll find a peace line – a wall that was built from iron, brick and steel in a bid to keep the peace. Many of these are still up over Belfast, Derry, Portadown and elsewhere in Northern Ireland, with footpaths running alongside them.

When visiting the staunch Loyalist and Republic neighbourhoods, it's hard not to notice the large murals painted on the sides of buildings. Some commemorate lives lost, while others advertise the Irish Republican Army or the Ulster Volunteer Force. All show the pain of Northern Ireland in the late 20th century. It's easy to see why Belfast provides plenty of dark tourism sites – it's estimated that more than 3,500 people were killed during the 30 years of division and fighting, and so many of the sites have been preserved or are commemorated with plaques. Some places are particularly harrowing to visit – the site of the Omagh bombing in 1998 is nothing short of heartbreaking as you stand where 29 innocent civilians lost their lives while the locals bustle around the town behind you.

Black Taxi tours will take you around Belfast to many of the Troubles sights, or you can head to Crumlin Road Gaol where many dissidents were held, although its history actually stretches back to the 1800s. Further afield, you can explore Londonderry/Derry and its infamous Bogside neighbourhood, home to the Battle of the Bogside. It's also where you'll see the city's famous sign: 'You are now entering Free Derry.' A stop sign has an IRA sticker on it – for some people this isn't just history, it's their lives.

The Troubles were a chaotic and brutal time in Northern Irish history, and there's much more to it than what we've been able to say here. But to read about it is one thing – to experience it is quite another. At times it can be harrowing seeing the sites of car bombs and bloodshed, but it's important in understanding the history of the United Kingdom and in seeing how far Northern Ireland has come in the last 20 years.

THE TWELFTH

Once a year, on 12 July, Protestant Ulstermen traditionally take to the streets... but why march at all? And why on this particular day?

The Protestant-Catholic divide is something that goes back hundreds of years in Ireland, all the way to the Battle of the Boyne in July 1690. In a bid to stop the deposed Catholic king James VII & II of Scotland and England from taking back his thrones, the newly crowned King William III, husband of James' daughter Mary and former prince of Orange, took his forces to the River Boyne, near Drogheda, in modern-day Ireland. The Protestant William won a resounding victory over the Catholic James, and it's still commemorated more than 300 years later.

In many Protestant towns across Northern Ireland you'll find Orange halls, home to members of the Orange Order. Fiercely Protestant – just attending a Catholic service could get you expelled – they can be seen marching through the streets on one day of the year: 12 July. Commonly referred to in Northern Ireland as the Twelfth, it's the day of William's victory, and so Protestants take to the streets waving orange flags and playing music. If you are travelling to the area at this time, it's worth being a little cautious as sometimes the Orangemen will parade on routes fairly close to Catholic neighbourhoods. However, in recent years attempts have been made to make the parades a more friendly atmosphere with the downplaying of political conflict. It's definitely a unique event.

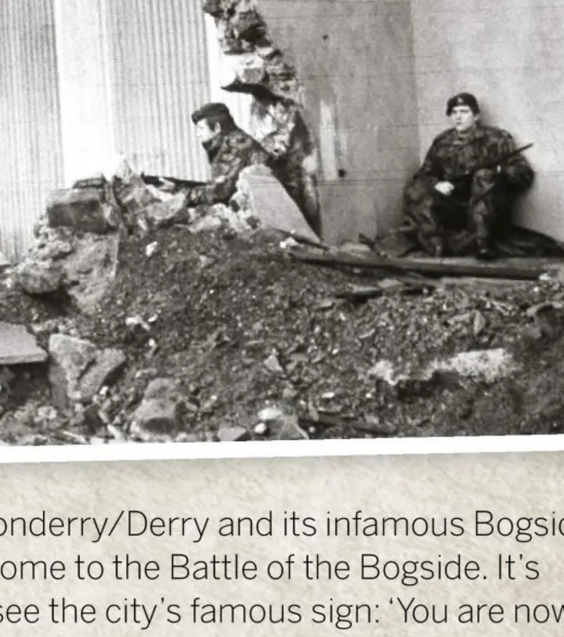


Image source: Pierrette13

Image source: Getty

Above: British troops patrol through the bombed-out ruins of the Broadway Hotel in Newry, 1972

Above, left: You won't just find these murals in Belfast and Londonderry/Derry – they're all over Northern Ireland. This one is in Bangor, Co. Down

COMMUNISM

DISCOVER THE PLACES THAT SUCCUMBED - AND IN SOME CASES, EMBRACED - COMMUNIST POLITICS

90 COLD WAR BERLIN, GERMANY
Discover the monuments and remnants of a divided Berlin

94 COMMUNIST MUSEUMS
Visit these living, breathing relics of Europe's dark past behind the Iron Curtain

98 PYONGYANG & DMZ, NORTH KOREA
North Korea is a living monument to totalitarian communism in a post-USSR world

90

94

Image source: Alamy

LOCATION

TIME ZONE

UTC+1

CURRENCY

Euro

TOP TIP

There are plenty of walking tours on offer in Berlin, which will take you on a tour of the essential post-war sites.

COLD WAR BERLIN

BERLIN NO LONGER SITS SIMMERING IN THE HEAT OF THE COLD WAR – BUT THE SIGHTS, THE STORIES AND THE SCARS REMAIN

To pause now next to the monumental Brandenburg Gate is to find yourself standing on what was once the fault-line running through the heart of Europe. The point where two competing ideologies of the 20th century, capitalism and communism, clashed as they balanced on the ruins of a third, defeated and discredited, dogma – that of National Socialism.

The death strip of the Berlin Wall that once surrounded the Brandenburg Gate is no more. Gone are the border guards of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) tasked with shooting traitors escaping to the West – replaced with selfie-shooting tourists and street performers posing for photos.

Above: Brandenburg Gate served as the dividing point between East and West Berlin, divided in the aftermath of World War II

The past, it has been said, is a foreign country. In the case of Germany, 'countries' would be a more precise term. The Bundesrepublik Deutschland of West Germany (BRD) lives on in its present form, whereas the former DDR of East Germany has receded like so much collapsing scenery. Traces of the era that saw these two Germanies centre stage in a clash of civilisations, however, are still visible – on the streets, in the museums and in the minds of the people of the now unified Berlin – like tide marks on the social, political and very real landscape of the German capital.

Read on to discover the sites of Cold-War Berlin that live on to this day through monuments, museums and memories of a bygone era.

Image source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-25949-0001 / Junge, Peter Heinz / CC-BY-SA 3.0

Image source: Thinkstock

Image source: Alamy

TEUFELSBERG

The Battle of Berlin in 1945 raged for a terrible fortnight and reduced the city to rubble, as Soviet forces shelled the already mutilated capital of Nazi Germany and were forced to fight street-by-street. The task of dealing with the aftermath of the battle was mainly left to groups of women, Trümmerfrauen (rubble women), who were press-ganged into relocating most of the debris.

As West Berlin grew as a landlocked exclave, deep behind the Iron Curtain, waste disposal continued in the Grunewald forest in the southwest, producing the tallest peak in the city – appropriately named Teufelsberg (Devil's Mountain). The remains of a United States National Security Agency listening station built on the rubble in the 1950s are still visible today, discernible from any vantage point in the city.

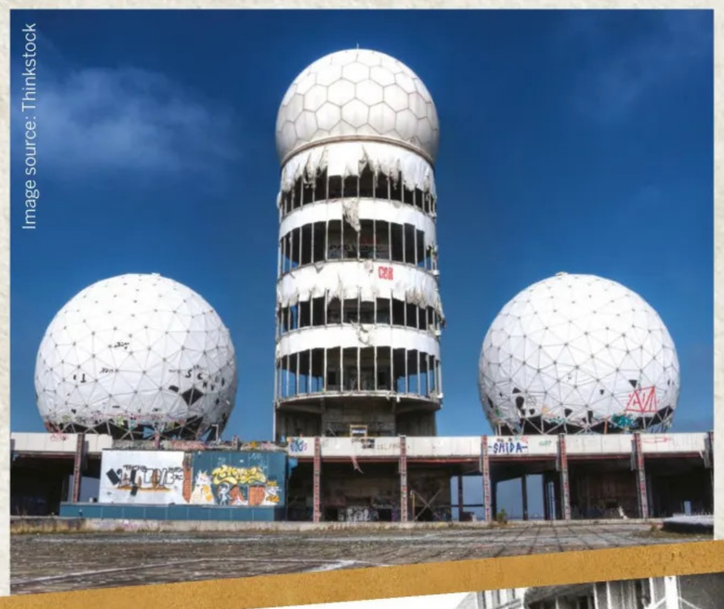


Image source: Thinkstock

RATHAUS SCHÖNEBERG

Visiting in 1963, US president John Fitzgerald Kennedy sought to rally the West Berliners and show solidarity with their cause – he addressed a crowd of around 450,000 people on a square in front of the West Berlin city hall.

Much has been made of Kennedy mistakenly referring to himself as a jam doughnut, using the phrase "Ich bin ein Berliner" (I am a Berliner). Including the 'ein' article would not be grammatically correct for a Berliner but in this figurative case, the Bostonian was correct as a non-Berliner drawing attention to his fellowship with the millions of real Berliners. Grammatical gymnastics it may be, but it's fortunate he wasn't in Frankfurt or Hamburg at the time. The square was renamed John F Kennedy Platz three days afterthe president's assassination later the same year.

Image source: Dnsob

KARL-MARX-ALLEE

Dubbed by Italian architect Aldo Rossi as the last great European street, Karl-Marx-Allee was constructed in the 1950s as the dust from the Second World War was still settling and much of Berlin resembled a battered moonscape.

Originally known as Stalinallee, it was the artery to the heart of the East German capital, stretching two kilometres from the Friedrichshain district to the TV tower at Alexanderplatz. Visiting dignitaries could admire the 'wedding cake' style architecture while cruising along this vast avenue; exhibiting stores replete with goods and restaurants serving cuisine from the DDR's Socialist sister states. The most renowned of the latter, Cafe Moscow (with its replica Sputnik satellite) now stands empty. The Kino International cinema remains, as does the famous Cafe Sibylle, which is home to what survived of the statue of Joseph Stalin that once stood triumphant on the street – a piece of his moustache and an ear.

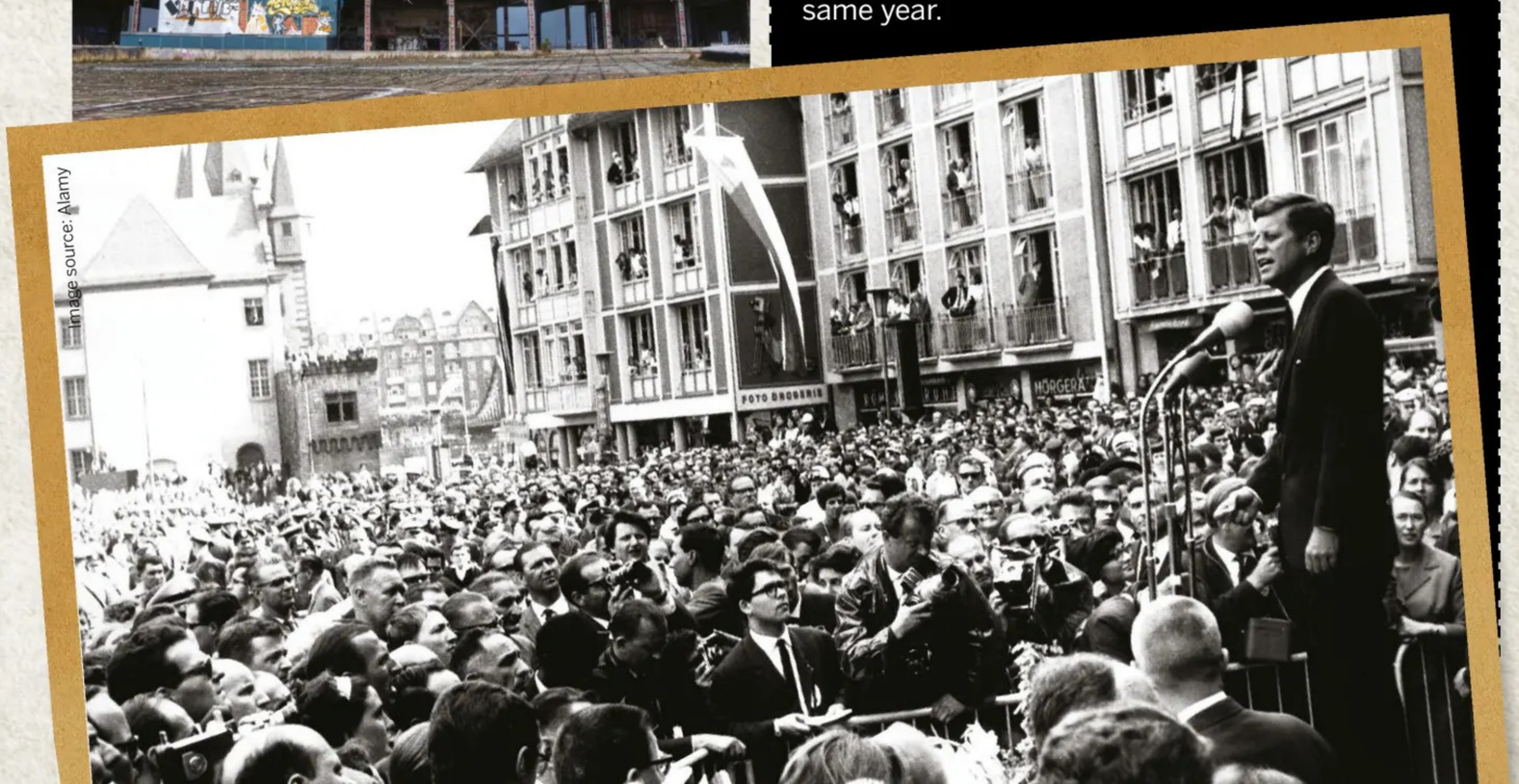


Image source: Alamy

EUROPE DIVIDED

No visit to Berlin would be complete without seeing, and touching, what remains of the Berlin Wall

Erected by the East German authorities on a Sunday morning in August 1961, the Wall completely surrounded the British, French and American occupation zones of West Berlin - it served as a barrier to stop the flow of East German citizens escaping to the West. Between 1949 and 1961 an estimated 2.7 million East Germans fled the country, many through West Berlin.

Two sizeable pieces of the Wall remain – that of the East Side Gallery and the section at the Berlin Wall Documentation Centre on Bernauer Strasse. The former is located directly next to the River Spree and maintained as a giant open-air gallery with 1.3 kilometres of graffiti murals. Don't miss the iconic image of the two Eastern leaders, Brezhnev and Honecker, smooching. The latter section is part of the recreated 'death strip' – complete with an original DDR watchtower that was bought on eBay – at Germany's official Berlin Wall Memorial.

The significance of the Bernauer Strasse section is not to be overlooked, the first known victim of the Wall died on this street in August 1961 – a 58-year-old woman named Ida Siekmann – as she jumped from an apartment window in the East and didn't survive the fall. Ten escape tunnels were dug in the area, including the legendary Tunnel 57, through which 57 people were smuggled in October 1964. The junction of Bernauer Strasse and Brunnenstrasse is also where border guard Conrad Schumann made his graceful 'leap to freedom'.

Image source: Superchilum

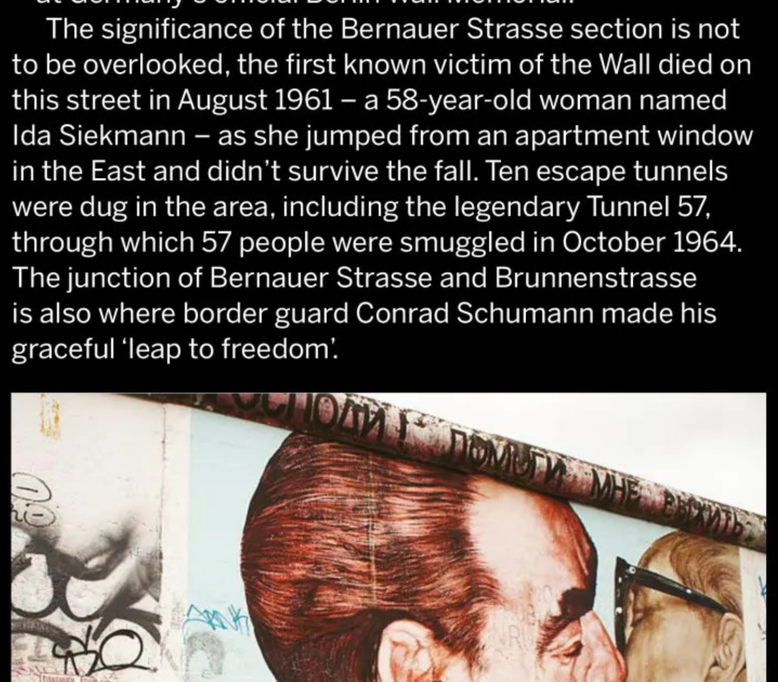
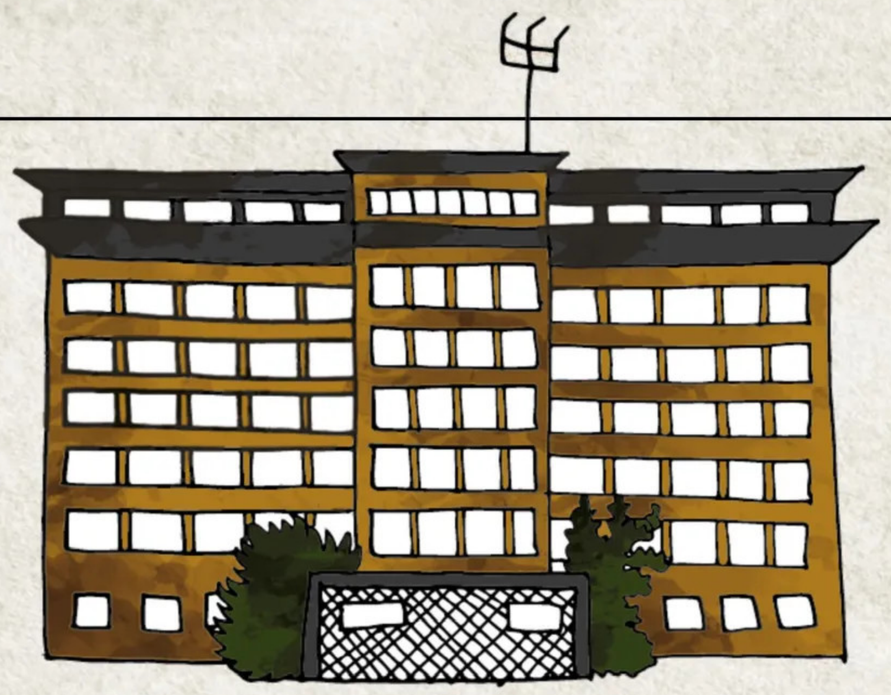


Image source: SSGT F. Lee Corkran, DoD photo, USA



STASI MUSEUM

East German dissident singer-songwriter, Wolf Biermann once playfully dismissed the need for diary-keeping in the DDR, as the secret police were doing a better job than he could.

By the time he was expelled from the country in 1976 his 'diary' amounted to thousands of pages. He was just one individual among millions who fell victim to the much feared Ministry of State Security (Stasi), the so-called 'Shield and Sword' of the ruling Socialist Unity Party, tasked with asserting the Marxist-Leninist ideal.

To fall under the nightmarish gaze of the Stasi was to risk a social disfigurement worse than any physical wound, in a country that was near impossible to leave, with a regime that expected absolute loyalty from its human property.

Eventually growing to become, proportionally, the largest secret police organisation of its kind ever to exist, the Stasi targeted, among many others, punks, rockers, poets, and even hitchhikers as being politically subversive, and sought to fully extricate them from society.

In January 1990, the Stasi headquarters in Berlin was stormed by protesters, with a museum quickly established to document the torment inflicted on the people forced to live under the heel of totalitarianism, which was implemented with a socialist face.

Smell jars, protocols for the psychological demolition of enemies of the state, surveillance equipment and the preserved office of former Stasi chief, Erich Mielke, are just some of the charms of this disturbing exhibit.

Image source: Alamy

CHECKPOINT CHARLIE

Freedom of movement for Allied personnel in Berlin had been guaranteed by the victorious powers at the end of WWII in Europe. So when in October 1961 the chief of the US mission was confronted while crossing into East Berlin via Checkpoint Charlie things got heated. As US forces tested the intentions of the East over the following days, the Soviets decided to roll T55 tanks to within metres of Checkpoint Charlie. US forces countered with M48 tanks and the two powers sat facing each other for 16 hours before disengaging. It was a rare occasion for Soviet and US forces to directly face each other on the streets of a major city. As the third crossing on a highway from West Berlin into East Berlin, Checkpoint Charlie was the Cold War frontier of Western capitalism. It is now a magnet for tourists, with replica checkpoint box, street performers dressed as US soldiers, and two chain companies staking their claim on the street.

Image source: The Central Intelligence Agency

TRABI SAFARI

Trabi Safari gives you the chance to join a sputtering conga line of East Germany's memorable little two-stroke clown cars for a narrated tour through the streets of Berlin. Revered as the 'car of the common man' it was not uncommon to hear of people waiting up to 15 years to receive a Trabant in the DDR. Tours average around two hours and the cars can fit up to four people, possibly five if you squeeze in the back.

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Thinkstock

TV TOWER

Rising up as the rare exclamation mark in an otherwise tame skyline, the Fernsehturm (Television Tower) was officially constructed by the East German government to broadcast colour television across the region. Completed in 1969, it remains the tallest structure in all of Germany and a towering masterpiece of Socialist architecture.

According to local legend, the tower originally stood at 365 metres high so that East German children could remember the height corresponding to the number of days in the year.

The tower boasts one of the fastest lifts in Europe at a speed of 21.6kmh, reaching the observation deck, which offers beautiful views of the city, in just 40 seconds. Above is a revolving restaurant – advance booking also includes fast-track entry to the tower.

DDR MUSEUM

From the reconstructed East German kitchen and living room (bugged by the secret police) to the real Trabant equipped with a virtual reality driving simulator, Berlin's 'most interactive museum' offers visitors a hands-on experience of what everyday life was like in East Germany.

The sights, sounds and smells of this now defunct state are recreated with a plethora of touch-screens, dials and installations. You'll also find a reconstructed Stasi prison cell, an East German cinema, and the pride of the exhibition: a ministerial Volvo, which was the kind of vehicle used by high-ranking bureaucrats as they would cruise to Berlin from the isolation of their colony north of the city.

The museum attempts to present an impartial view of the DDR, to let visitors decide on the true nature of the East. A good epilogue when leaving the museum is to pass the nearby statues of Marx and Engels, the founding fathers of Communism, and ask yourself whether they are resting, content in the success of the Socialist paradise, or sat on their suitcases ready to run away to the West.

COMMUNIST MUSEUMS

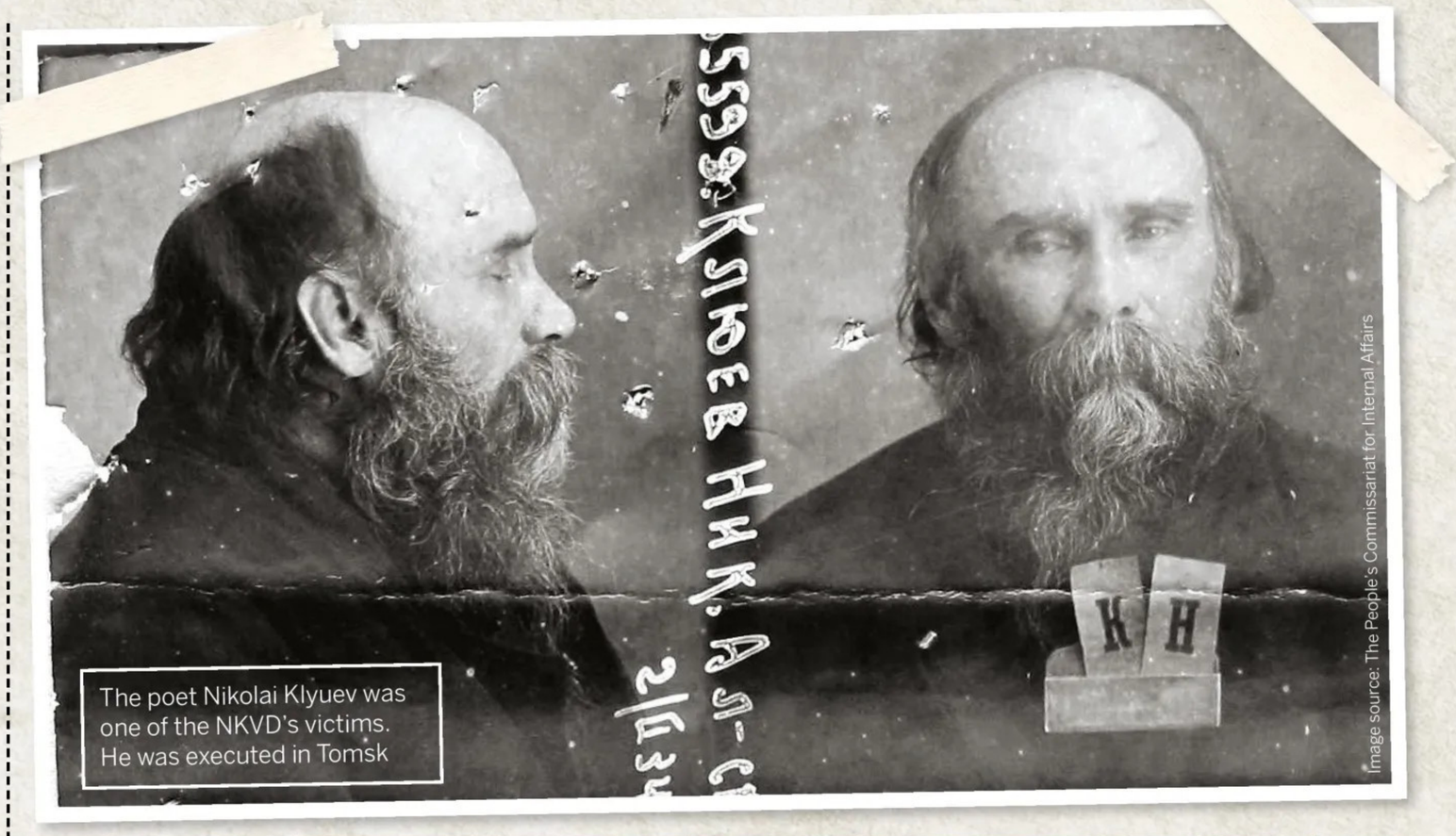
VISIT THESE LIVING, BREATHING REMNANTS OF EUROPE'S PAST BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

HOUSE OF TERROR

This beautiful building on a leafy Budapest street belies what's inside

Location: Budapest, Hungary
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Hungarian forint

When you visit the ominously named House of Terror, you enter the belly of the beast – the HQ of Hungary's secret police, both fascist and communist. You begin your journey through time at the top floor of the building, where you'll learn about the political conditions in the country that led to a secret police being formed. As you descend, you'll see exhibitions on Hungary's two regimes of terror and learn about 20th century Hungarian history, before ending your visit in the dungeon-style basement. It was here that victims were imprisoned, tortured and eventually killed.



The poet Nikolai Klyuev was one of the NKVD's victims. He was executed in Tomsk

Image source: The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs

The museum allows visitors to look at top-secret NKVD documents from the time

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Itto Ogami

NKVD MEMORIAL MUSEUM OF POLITICAL REPRESSION HISTORY

Look into the lives of ordinary Russians, whose only crimes were disobeying Stalin

Location: Tomsk, Russia
Time zone: UTC+7 **Currency:** Russian ruble

Far out in the Siberian steppe is the town of Tomsk. A 'closed city' in the Soviet era, it was kept secret for decades. This museum, housed in a former NKVD (Stalin's secret police) prison, shows what life was like at the height of Stalin's terror in the 1930s.

Experience the intensity of an interrogation in the restored rooms before descending into the cells to see the awful conditions in which political dissidents were kept. This museum is a fitting tribute to the NKVD's victims, and some of their personal possessions are on display, painfully representing the lives that were ruined by Stalin's paranoia.

Image source: iijjcoo

KGB CELLS MUSEUM

This miserable Tallinn building was once host to all manner of horrors

Location: Tartu, Estonia
Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro

Tartu's former KGB headquarters stares down at the city like an aggressive, dark grey monolith. It symbolised all the Estonians hated about their Soviet overlords, and for many, it was the last they'd see of their home country before being sent to the Gulags. Now, you can view the building for yourself. Step inside the grimy prison cells, and note the bricked-up windows, which were designed to muffle the sounds of screaming emanating from the torture chambers. You can also learn about the underground resistance movements, many of whom fell victim to the KGB.

Image source: Adam Jones from Kelowna, BC, Canada

This chair was used to restrain prisoners during interrogation and torture

Above: It might not look like much from the outside, but inside it's a different story

Image source: Laika ac from UK

This classroom displays what Young Pioneers (the communist youth groups) would have learned at school

Below: The Museum is located inside the Savarin Palace – just above a casino

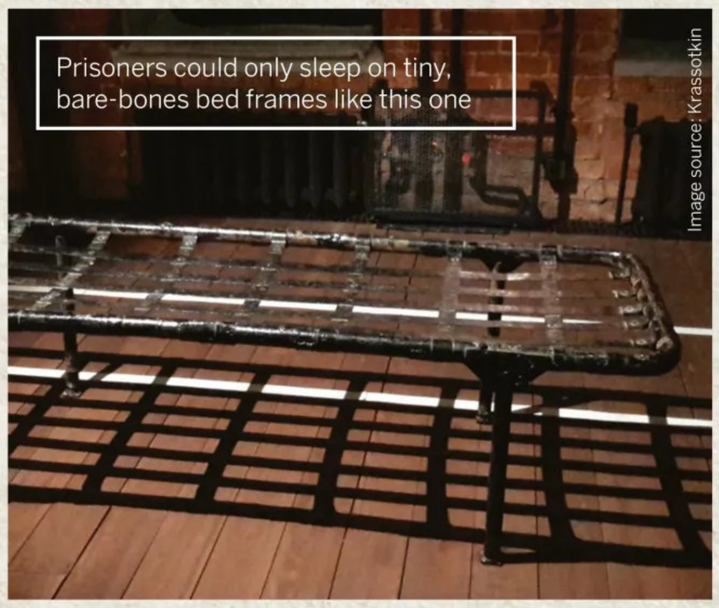


Image source: Krassotkin

Prisoners could only sleep on tiny, bare-bones bed frames like this one

GULAG HISTORY MUSEUM

This new museum examines life in Stalin's prison camps

Location: Moscow, Russia
Time zone: UTC+3
Currency: Russian ruble

Upon entering this museum, you'll hear the frightening noise of a door slamming shut behind you, followed by loud, approaching footsteps. Moscow's Gulag History Museum seeks to re-create the atmosphere of the USSR's notorious Gulag camps, which were located in the most wild, remote parts of the country, as a large map inside demonstrates. Political prisoners, among other 'criminals', were forced to do backbreaking work, fed meagre rations, and kept in conditions of up to 170 people per cell. The Gulag History Museum has original metal bed frames on display, showing just how claustrophobic and uncomfortable a spell in the Gulag would have been.

MUSEUM OF COMMUNISM

See how the state once seeped into all parts of Prague life

Location: Prague, Czech Republic
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Czech koruna

If you've ever wondered what life was like behind the Iron Curtain in the charming city of Prague, look no further. As well as covering political repression, state terror and secret police, this museum also looks at life for ordinary citizens of the Czech Socialist Republic. See how propaganda permeated through every aspect of life, beginning with education and continuing to influence a person's life via the media, art and films. You can even walk through a school classroom to see how indoctrination began at a young age. However, the final part of the museum explains the Velvet Revolution, a peaceful uprising that brought an end to communist rule in Czechoslovakia.

Image source: ŠJů, Wikimedia Commons

CEAUSESCU MUSEUM

See the spot where Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife were shot

Location: Târgoviste, Romania
Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Romanian leu

'Military Unit 01417' holds an important place in Romanian history as the place where the puppet dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife/deputy Prime Minister Elena spent their last days, before being trialled and executed immediately afterwards. His 24-year-rule was particularly brutal and authoritarian, even by Soviet standards, and has made a lasting impact on Romania's people. Now, this place in the pretty town of Târgoviste has opened to the public. Explore the courtroom where the couple were put on trial, see how they were kept prisoner by their people, and even look at the bullet holes that still mark where the pair were executed on Christmas Day in 1989.

Image source: Hyro84

Image source: Getty

MEMENTO PARK

Hungary hides its communist past in this graveyard for statues

Location: Budapest, Hungary
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Hungarian forint

This open-air museum in Budapest's southern outskirts is where 42 statues and monuments from the country's communist era are displayed. Of particular note is the replica of 'Stalin's Boots', which were all that remained of the city's Stalin statue after it was torn down in an iconic moment from the Hungarian Revolution. Other statues depict Lenin, Marx, Engels, Red Army soldiers, Bulgarian leaders and prominent Hungarian communists. The park's charismatic creator said he hoped the collection of statues would inspire people to "Think freely about dictatorship. Or about democracy, come to that! Or about anything!"

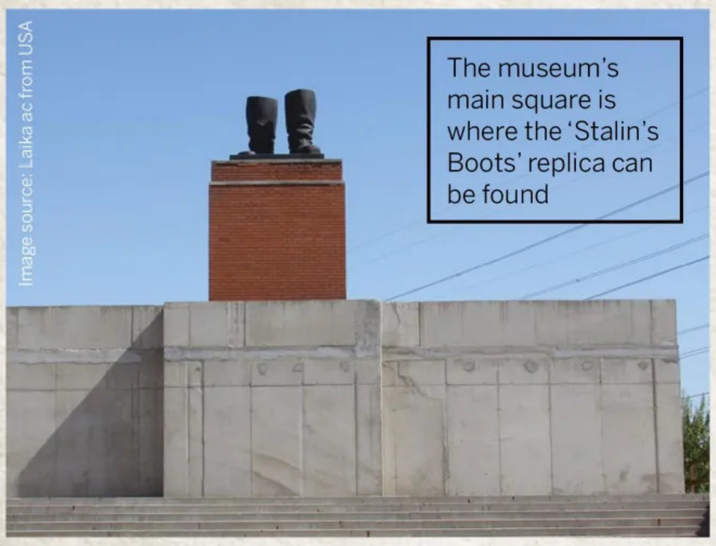


Image source: Laika ac from USA

The museum's main square is where the 'Stalin's Boots' replica can be found

MUSEUM OF CRIMES AND VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM

Learn about Slovakia's freedom fighters in this museum

Location: Bratislava, Slovakia
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

This fledgling museum is a volunteer project, and relies on donations and funding to keep it going. It was set up to educate teachers, schools and the public about Slovakia's anti-communist resistance, and inside you can learn about the lives of some of its most famous members on the 'Wall of Inconspicuous Heroes'. Their stories are brought to life via the personal objects they left behind, now placed on tasteful display in the museum. There's also a library, and you can listen to lectures on the subject. Plan your visit carefully, though, as it's only open on Thursdays.

Image source: Alamy

MUSEUM OF OCCUPATIONS AND FREEDOM FIGHTS

This controversial museum showcases two dark periods in Lithuanian history

Location: Vilnius, Lithuania
Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro

This beautifully grand palace stands out in the Vilnius landscape, and has been used by German and Soviet occupiers alike. First, it was a Gestapo headquarters, but when the Soviets came they converted it into a lair for their own secret police.

Most of the museum is dedicated to the Soviet occupation and Lithuanian resistance to the Russians, but it attracted controversy because many felt it did not cover the German occupation well enough. To remedy this, a small exhibit on the Holocaust in Lithuania was opened in 2011 – but some say it is still not fit for purpose.

Image source: Ardfern

The palace was built in the late 19th century as a municipal building

The execution room, and other rooms in the basement, are left as they were when KGB officers departed Lithuania in 1991

Image source: Adam Jones from Kelowna, BC, Canada

Image source: Zygmunt Put Zetpe0202

PRL MUSEUM

Experience the reality of daily life in communist Poland inside this museum

Location: Warsaw, Poland
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Polish złoty

While there's no denying that life under a communist dictatorship is filled with strife, fear and pain, it's also true that some days can be mundane and dull, just as they are everywhere else. The PRL museum shows you this side of everyday life in communist Poland – so as well as military and police artefacts, you'll also find household goods, family photographs and the latest in Soviet technology. The museum aims to give a complete picture of life in Poland at the time, acknowledging the hardships suffered by its people, while reflecting on some aspects of life back then with a hint of nostalgia.

Image source: Tothkarol

PYRAMIDEN

If you're intrepid enough to get here, you're in for a step back in time

Location: Svalbard, Norway
Time zone: UTC+2
Currency: Norwegian krone

The desolate, chilly Norwegian islands of Svalbard aren't often on many people's bucket lists, but if you have the urge to peer inside a Soviet-era mining town, look no further. The site was purchased from Norway by the USSR back in 1927 because it was rich in coal, and, at its height in the 1980s, around 1,000 people lived there. Aside from the coal mine, there was a theatre, a 24-hour café, a school, petrol station, library and even a sports complex with the northernmost swimming pool in the world. The town was abandoned in the late 1990s, but there are plans to partially rebuild it and open more of it up to tourists.

The town was named after the pyramid-shaped mountain it sits near

Image source: Prillen

HOUSE OF LEAVES

'Big Brother' is nothing new, as this Albanian museum shows

Location: Tirana, Albania
Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Albanian lek

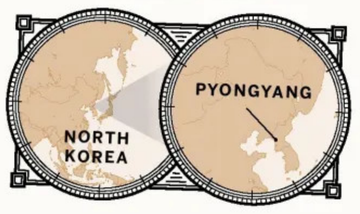
Albania's newest museum, the House of Leaves, discusses the communist regime of Enver Hoxha. The museum's name refers to the leaves of paper in the top-secret files inside, because this building was home to the notorious National Intelligence Service, which repressed any political dissidence in the country. The museum is officially dedicated to the victims of the Intelligence Service, and inside you'll find depictions of torture methods and examples of surveillance technology from the past, as well as information on how Hoxha's state sought to exert total control over hearts, bodies and minds. Allow a good couple of hours to take it all in.

The pleasant-looking building was originally built as a medical clinic

Image source: Bes-ART

The Monument to the Foundation of the Workers' Party celebrates 50 years of the Communist Party, with a symbolic hammer, sickle and calligraphy brush

LOCATION



TIME ZONE

UTC-9

CURRENCY

North Korean won

TOP TIP

Be sure to pay respect to North Korean laws and customs or you could face very severe consequences with limited consular assistance.

Image source: Alamy

NORTH KOREA

NORTH KOREA IS A LIVING MONUMENT TO TOTALITARIAN COMMUNISM IN A POST-USSR WORLD THAT HAS SINCE MOVED ON

At the end of World War II, the Japanese were defeated and ejected from Korea, which was instead occupied by the Americans in the south and the Soviets to the north. Soon after, the communist North Korean leader Kim Il-sung – a hero who had previously fought the Japanese using guerrilla warfare – launched a bloody civil war which would later result in a de facto division of the country into two halves.

North Korea has since developed into an increasingly totalitarian society, presided over by Kim Il-sung's successors, his son Kim Jong-il and grandson Kim Jong-un. From the outset the regime has been marked by purges, ruthless control and a powerful cult of personality around the Kim bloodline. Having been destroyed, the country's capital, Pyongyang, was rebuilt in Kim Il-sung's image, and is today dressed head to toe in statues and monuments – a living, breathing shrine to the ruling family. The Kumsusan Memorial Palace of the Sun contains a mausoleum, housing the bodies of the first two leaders.

Above: The eccentric Pyongyang metro system was supposedly designed to withstand a nuclear apocalypse

Elsewhere, museums take liberties with the truth. While the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum holds a statue of Kim Il-sung, with striking resemblance to Kim Jong-un, an enormous mural depicts Kim Il-sung liberating Pyongyang from Japan, rather than the Soviets.

Despite the novelty, visiting North Korea is a serious affair. Tourists are taken on highly controlled tours of the sites and destinations that the government wants the outside world to see, avoiding the uncomfortable truths it would rather obscure. The resultant experience borders on delusion and danger. While some tourists have attempted to sneak currency and black market posters depicting the leadership out of the country, others, such as American Otto Warmbier, accused of stealing a poster, have ended up dead.

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Alamy

Beyond the illusion, there are some marvels to behold. The city's deep metro system doubles as a nuclear bunker network, complete with blast doors. With Soviet support, the North rapidly built up its military and economic infrastructure, orientated around the country's abundance of coal, metals and other natural resources, as well as hydroelectric power. As a result, literacy today stands at 99 per cent.

While the Tower of the Juche Idea pays tribute to the North Korean philosophy of Juche underpinning their interpretation of communism, the Monument to the Foundation of the Workers' Party, featuring an epic hammer, sickle and calligraphy brush, celebrated 50 years of the Korean Worker's Party.

However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, North Korea's economy was decimated. Despite international sanctions the country has continued to expend great sums on its military – one of the largest in the world – and, specifically, its nuclear programme. The epic pyramidical Ryugyong Hotel began as an ambitious project to build the world's tallest hotel in 1987 but was never completed, and today sits unoccupied.

It symbolises the country's role as a time capsule to the totalitarian communist regimes of yesteryear – a land of terror, farce and squalor, held together by the glue of military might, surveillance and institutionalised propaganda. The story of the Kim dynasty is equally terrifying and ridiculous; the unlikely inheritor Kim Jong-un was supposedly nominated heir after his older brother Kim Jong-nam was caught trying to smuggle himself into Tokyo Disneyland. After Kim took control, his sibling was assassinated at a Malaysian airport, just one of many alleged extrajudicial killings to cement his rule.

With no official peace treaty in place between the two Koreas, the North has maintained an incredibly hostile approach to the South. A notable film buff, Kim Jong-il famously kidnapped directors and actors to produce propaganda films, many of which were credited to his own artistic vision. Pyongyang Film Studios houses many of the sets used to produce the country's anti-Japanese, anti-American films.

Top, left: The Tower of the Juche Idea is a monument to the North Korean philosophy of self-determination

Top, right: Though Ryugyong Hotel was supposed to be a projection of North Korean prestige, it has since turned into a symbol of the country's post-Soviet economy – an impressive facade over an empty building

Right: The Panmunjom Joint Security Area was made neutral after a 1976 North Korean 'axe murder' incident

PANMUNJOM AND THE DMZ

Nowhere symbolises the fragile peace between North and South Korea quite like the buffer zone

Between the two Koreas is a neutral area known as the Demilitarised Zone, or DMZ – 31 miles north of South Korea's Seoul and six miles east of North Korea's Gaeseong. At its heart is the Joint Security Area – known in Korean as Panmunjom – where delegates met in 1951 and 1953 to sign the Armistice Agreement dividing the country along the 38th parallel.

Although the region is meant to serve as a buffer zone between the two states, over one mile wide on each side, the North has dug a network of tunnels beneath it in case of war, and in times of tension the South plays K-Pop to North Korean soldiers over loudspeakers. The 1,635-metre '3rd Tunnel' was discovered by the South in 1978, capable of transporting approximately 30,000 troops an hour. Visitors can also see bullet holes left by North Korean soldiers firing at defectors.

Ringed by mines, the Panmunjom Joint Security Area, 800-metres wide, is manned by UN guards. It was made a neutral zone after an incident in 1976 where North Korean soldiers hacked down two American soldiers when trying to cut down a tree.

Image source: Alamy

Insert Image source: Getty

TOMBS AND MAUSOLEUMS

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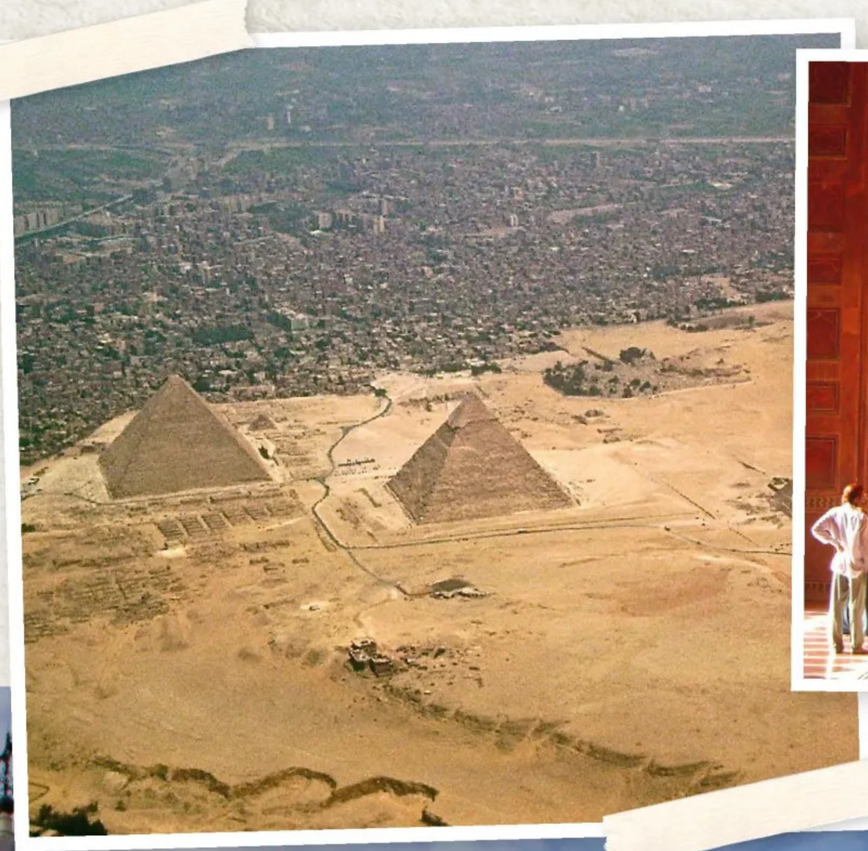
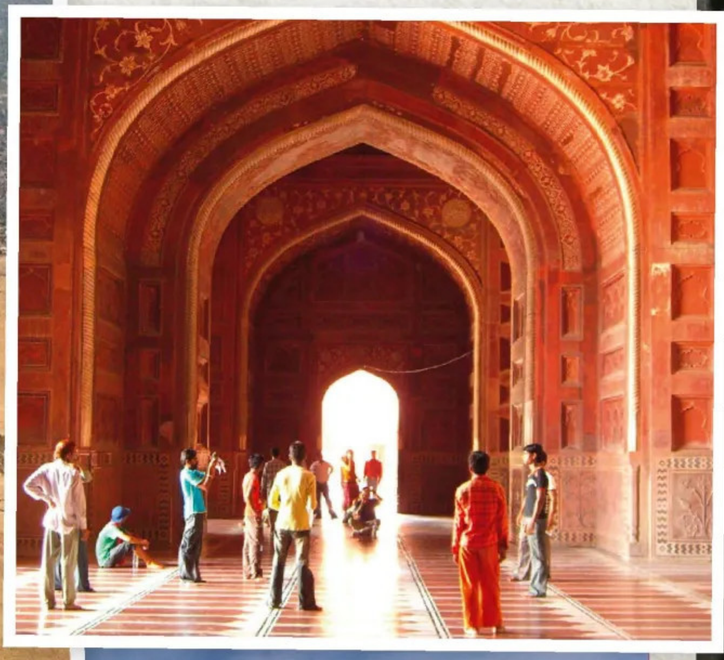
No dark tourist can rest until they have visited the perfectly preserved bodies of the great leaders of communism





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OSSEMENTS DE LANCIEN
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HỒ CHÍ MINH
KÍNH MẾN !

CHỦ TỊCH
HỒ - CHÍ - MINH

MAUSOLEUMS AND TOMBS

UNCOVER SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST SPECTACULAR RESTING PLACES

PYRAMIDS OF GIZA

The pyramids are one of the world's most famous sites, and with good reason

Location: Giza, Egypt
Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Egyptian pound

They are among the most iconic structures in the world, seen in countless photographs, documentaries and films, but nothing comes close to viewing the Pyramids of Giza with your own eyes. These celebrated, towering resting places of god-kings are located west and south of the bustling metropolis of modern Cairo. Giza's Great Pyramid is perhaps the most famous, and the sheer cubic content of this mammoth structure is staggering, at 2.3 million cubic metres. However, the smaller pyramids of Chephren, Mycerinus and those in the eastern and western cemeteries are also essential viewing. These ancient tombs are forever guarded and watched over by the spectre of the Great Sphinx, the world's oldest monumental sculpture and a testament to human artistic achievement.

Right: The pyramids, here seen from the air, look out over the city of Giza and offer a spectacular view from any angle

Image source: Robster1983

"These ancient tombs are forever guarded and watched over by the spectre of the Great Sphinx"

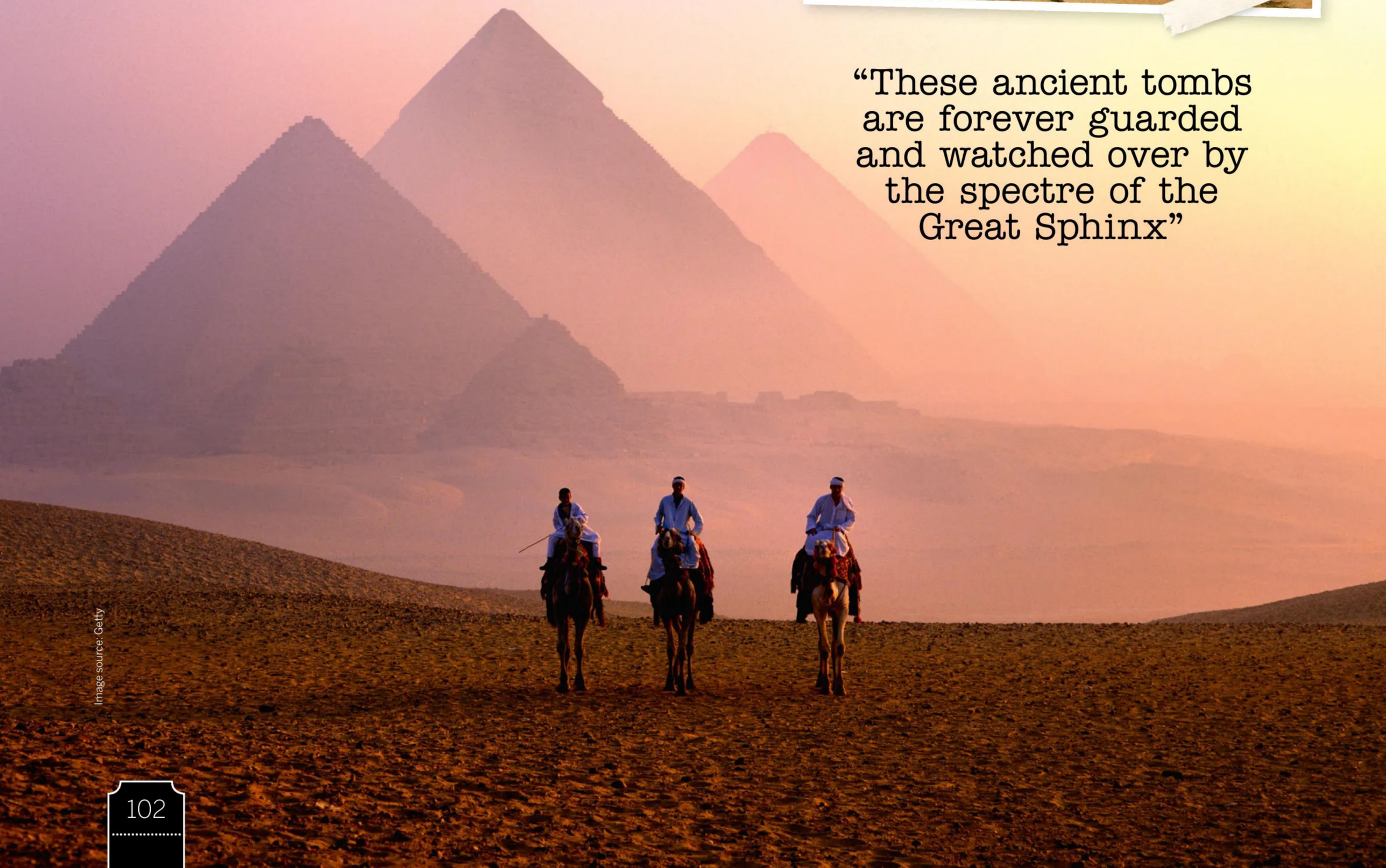


Image source: Getty

Insert image source: Ricardo Liberato

THE TOMB OF CYRUS THE GREAT

Despite its humble appearance, this tomb lives on as a monument to the Achaemenid Empire

Location: Pasargadae, Iran
Time zone: UTC+3.30 **Currency:** Iranian rial

The tomb of Cyrus the Great is not the biggest or most opulent of the sites in this guide, but its historical importance has earned it a place on the list. Located in the former Persian capital of Pasargadae, this monument was built as the final resting place of the founder of the Achaemenid Empire in the summer of 530 BCE. The monument measures 13 x 12 metres and features a platform of stepped stone. Inside are two chambers: an attic and the tomb itself. Visitors to this famous monument will be keeping good company, as it was visited by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE.

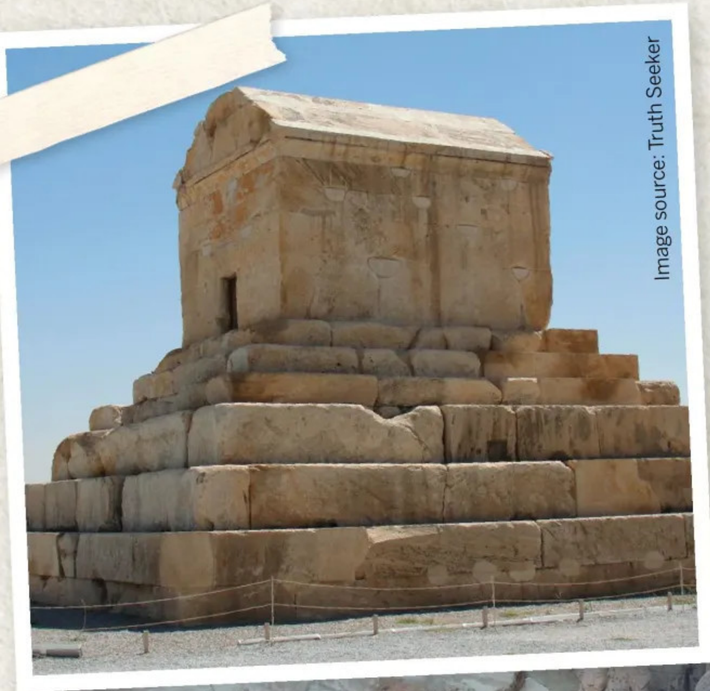


Image source: Truth Seeker

Image source: Maros M r a z

QIN SHI HUANG DI'S TOMB

A remarkable discovery was made when this emperor's resting place was rediscovered

Location: Shaanxi, China
Time zone: UTC+8 **Currency:** Renminbi

Found at the foot of the Lishan Mountain, this vast mausoleum is the largest in China, and served as the burial site of Emperor Qin Shi Huang, founder of the first unified empire. Perhaps best known for its army of stone warriors, until 1974 this wonder of the ancient world remained hidden; it was stumbled upon by two local farmers who, while digging a well, discovered a pit housing 6,000 terracotta figures. This fleet of warriors is each carved with a unique face, and equipped with weapons, chariots and horses.

LA RECOLETA CEMETERY

A who's who of Argentine celebrities and elite

Location: Buenos Aires, Argentina
Time zone: UTC-3 Currency: Argentine peso

Any visit to Buenos Aires is incomplete without a visit to this renowned cemetery. Before Buenos Aires had even paved streets or public services, this burial site was created to improve city sanitation. Over time the elite of Argentina adopted it as their own, and today it reads as a who's who of Argenine history. Hours can be spent wandering through this city of the dead, marvelling at the famous names buried there and appreciating the fading beauty of the elaborate statues and marble mausoleums.

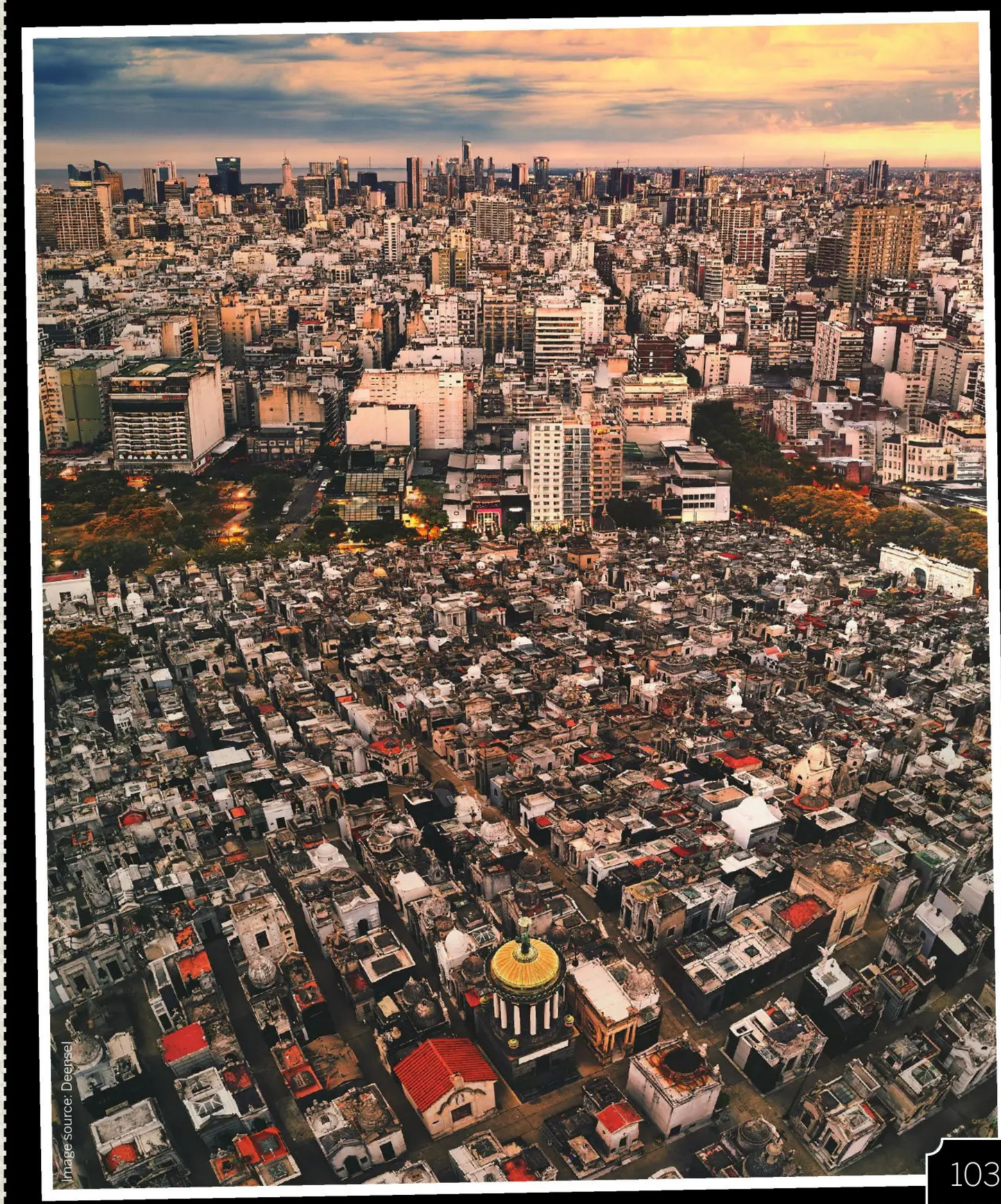


Image source: Deepsel

Image source: Shutterstock

Image source: Donelson

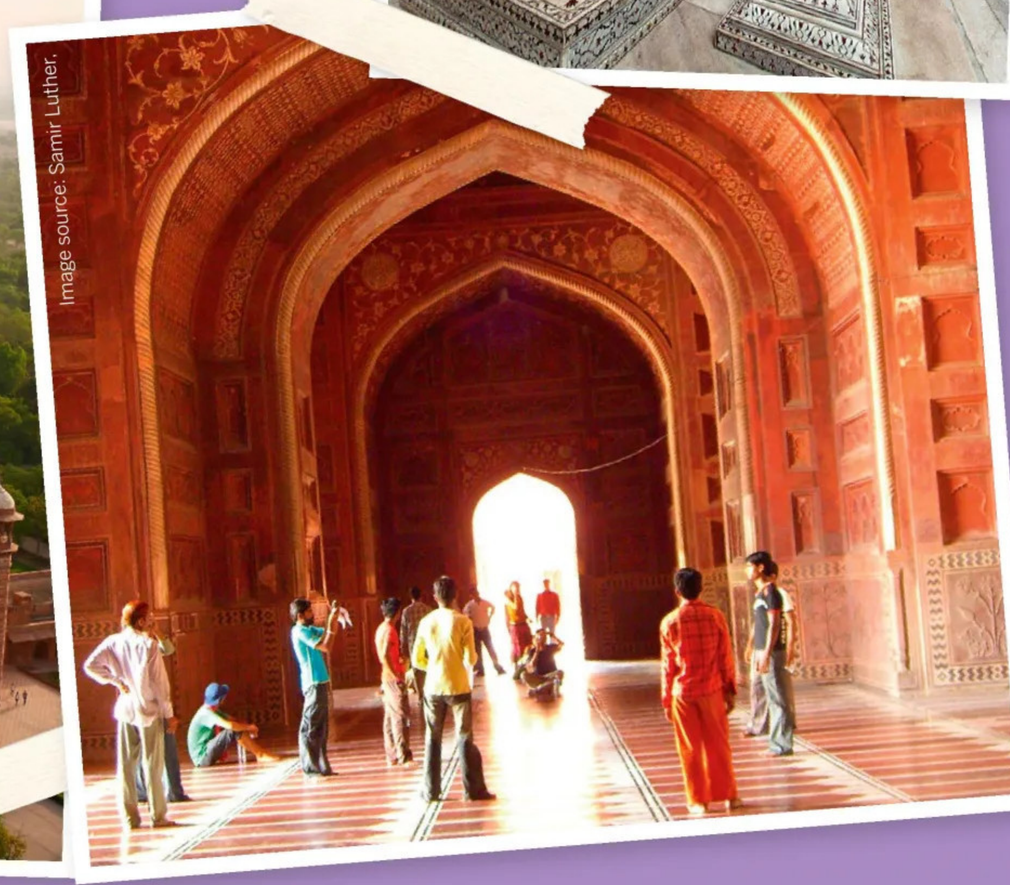


Image source: Samir Luther,

TAJ MAHAL

The world's most spectacular resting place is more than just a tomb; it's a monument to love

Location: Agra, India
Time zone: UTC+5.30 **Currency:** Indian rupee

An iconic image of enduring love, the Taj Mahal was built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in dedication to the memory of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. This masterpiece of architecture has earned the title of one of the world's most spectacular wonders, and is one of the most admired works of art on the planet. An army of masons, painters, stone-cutters and artisans the world over combined their skills to create this feat of symmetrical beauty.

The tomb of Mahal sits in the centre of a 17-hectare complex comprising luscious blooming gardens, a mosque and a guest house. Every square inch of the Taj Mahal has been painstakingly designed, with intricate flowers carved into the marble, precious jewel inlays, incised paintings and sweeping archways. For many, the Taj comes as close as humanly possible to personifying beauty itself.

Above left: Not often seen in images of the Taj Mahal, the main gateway of the complex is built in red sandstone

Above right: Inside the mosque area, a beautiful example of its ornate archways and artwork

Top: The tombs of both Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal in the crypt

Right: The four sides of the Taj Mahal are identical, creating a sublime mirrored image

Image source: Getty

"This masterpiece of architecture has earned the title of one of the world's most spectacular wonders"

Image source: Getty

THE SEDLEC OSSUARY

Few places are quite as thrilling – and chilling – as the Czech Republic's morbid Sedlec Ossuary

Location: Kutna Hora, Czech Republic
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Czech koruna

There is a place where the living and the dead meet, where human remains and man-made architecture collide to create one of the most breathtaking sights the unsuspecting traveller might ever stumble upon. This is the Sedlec Ossuary, the Church of Bones.

The Sedlec Ossuary is located beneath the Cemetery Church of All Saints, an unassuming Medieval chapel in the Czech Republic city of Kutna Hora. Step inside, however, and you will be transported to another world, one where more than 60,000 human skeletons have been painstakingly picked apart and refashioned into an ornate Gothic interior.

The bones form coats of arms, laurel wreathes and vast, sweeping archways that have come a long way since the 15th century, when they were dug out of mass graves during the construction of the chapel. Sprinkled with soil from Golgotha, this was believed to be a blessed place to be buried and people came from across the country to lay their dead to rest at Sedlec.

For centuries, the excavated bones lay in neglected piles until, in 1870, František Rint came to Sedlec. Rint was a woodcarver with an eye for the unusual. He took the skeletons and fashioned them into one of the most macabre and awe-inspiring ecclesiastical interiors in the world.

The centrepiece of this UNESCO World Heritage Site is the chandelier, made up of every bone in the human body, while elsewhere, Rint left his signature on the wall, spelled out by the bones of the dead.

Image source: Pudelek (Marcin Szala)

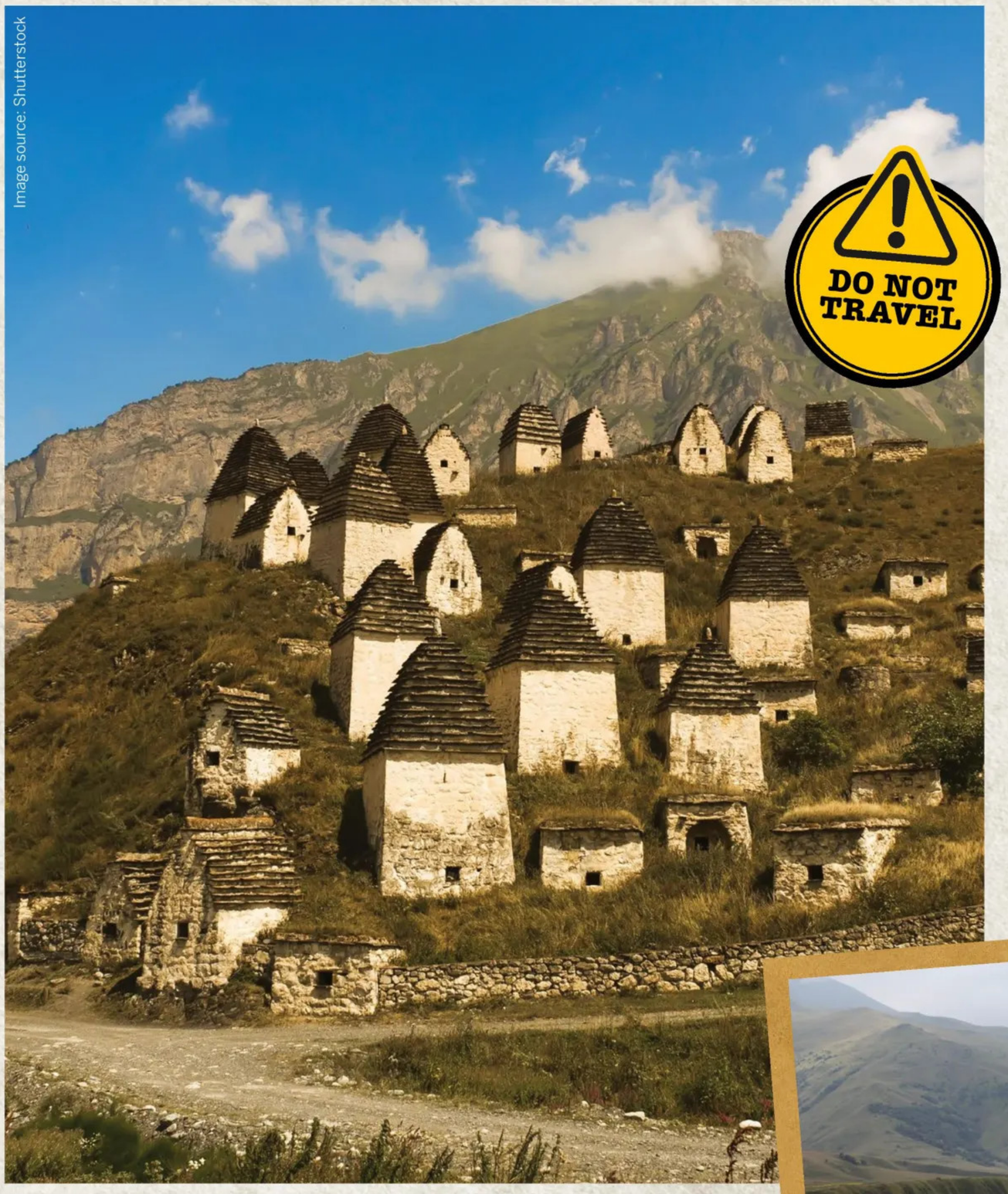


Image source: Shutterstock

DARGAVS VILLAGE

Despite its mysterious and inaccessible location, this necropolis has captured the imagination of dark tourists

Location: North Ossetia-Alania, Russia
Time zone: UTC+4 **Currency:** Russian ruble

This village is known as the 'city of the dead' – a necropolis of Northern Russia where 99 house-like tombs serve as the resting place for hundreds of people.

Dargavs is a mysterious place, accessible only by a long and perilous journey along treacherous mountain roads. At the end of the road lies what appears to be a Medieval settlement, yet this is a settlement that is home to no living soul. Within these buildings, some numbering as high as four storeys, archaeologists have found the remains of bodies dating back to at least the 16th century.

Nobody knows the story behind Dargavs, yet local legend claims that this Ossetian site was once built to house victims of a devastating plague. Those who died in the houses were simply left there and, over the centuries, new bodies were laid beside them. Mysteriously, some of the remains have been found laid out in wooden boats, perhaps to ferry them into the after life, while the wells dotted through the site allowed grieving families to discover the fate of their loved one. If a coin dropped into the well can be heard to strike a stone at the bottom, it was taken as a sign that the dead person's soul had safely reached heaven.

This sombre, isolated spot has understandably become a place that is now rich in legends, with locals warning that anyone who enters the cemetery alive will never leave. It may well be a chance worth taking, because this city of the dead is a place unlike any other on earth.

Image source: Thinkstock

ENTER THE CATACOMBS

Ancient caverns full of long-dead people are always a magnet for dark tourists. Just don't stray from the path...

LES CATACOMBES DE PARIS

AH, PARIS. THE EIFFEL TOWER, THE LOUVRE, THE SEINE...
AND SIX MILLION SKELETONS IN THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS OSSUARY

Location: Paris, France Time zone: UTC+1 Currency: Euro

You'd expect a lot of interesting things 20 metres beneath the streets of a city centre with as much history as Paris, but perhaps not the bones of six million people. This enormous ossuary was created when Parisian cemeteries, ripe with centuries of the dead – including thousands of victims of the plague that had wiped out nearly half of the city's population in 1466 – began to burst at the seams. The pivotal moment came when Les Innocents spilled its grim occupants into the basement of a popular restaurant in 1780. The authorities quickly closed five of the city's cemeteries and decided to empty them into the long-abandoned tunnels of Paris's 12th-century limestone mines.

Cue two years of macabre night-time processions in which millions of (mostly skeletal) dead were carted under black sackcloth down the main drag to the catacombs entrance.

Today, following extensive renovation, there are up to 200 miles of bone galleries, split into several networks, some of which are open to the public. The simplest way to access the catacombs is via the public entrance at Place Denfert-Rochereau, which is little more than glorified green shed. The catacombs themselves are a surreal experience, with neat rows of skulls and limbs symmetrically arranged along winding passages dotted with ghoulish alcoves. To think that someone paused to consider the aesthetics of building a shrine out of human bones... was respect for the city's dead foremost in the mind of the architect?

Some tips for visitors: book timed entrance tickets well in advance or prepare to queue for a couple of hours, as the lines can easily go 200-deep. Also, bring a warm jacket (the temperature is 14 degrees Celsius) and stick to the delineated route. One gloomy, bone-lined passageway looks much the same as the next after a while, and by straying down one of the cordoned-off tunnels it would be easy to get lost. In fact, two teenage boys did just that in 2017 – they went missing in the tunnels for three days, having ventured into cordoned-off areas. When the rescue party found them they were suffering from hypothermia but otherwise unharmed.

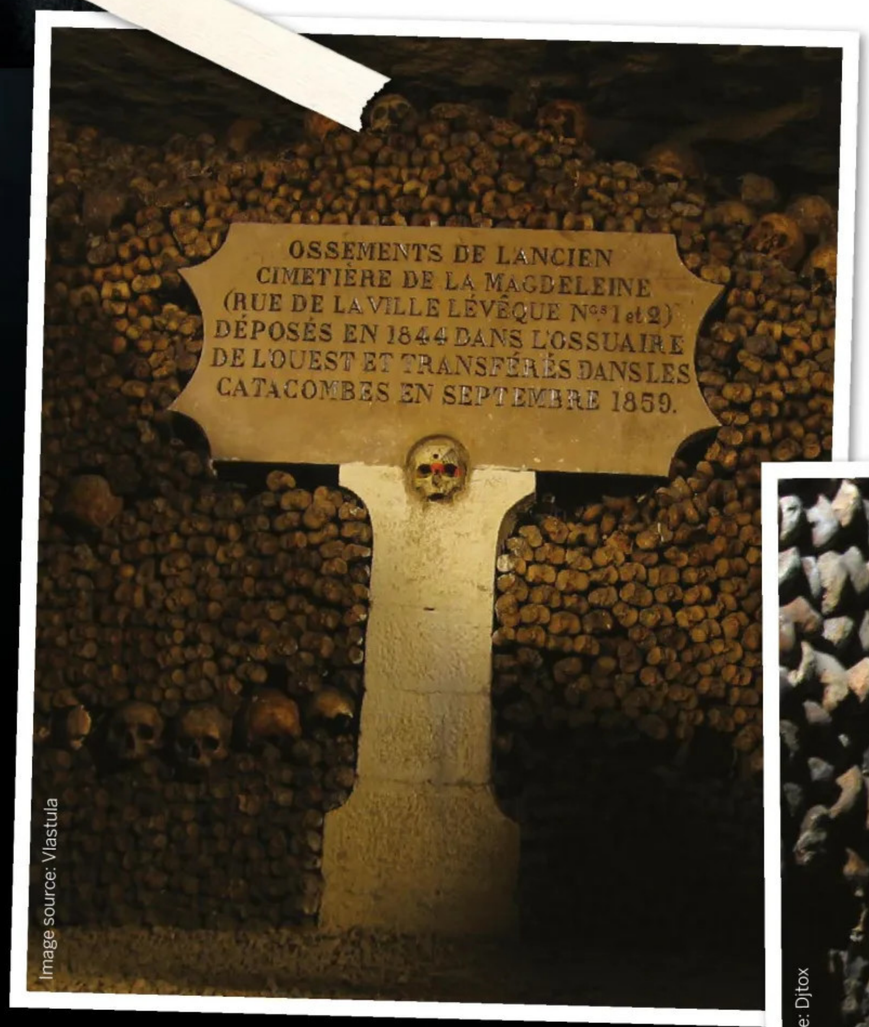


Image source: Vlastula

Image source: Djtox

CATACOMBE DI ROMA

EXPLORE 300 YEARS OF DEAD PEOPLE, INTERRED IN SUBTERRANEAN TOMBS MORE THAN 1,500 YEARS OLD

Location: Rome, Italy Time zone: UTC+1 Currency: Euro

The Romans, it seems, bought into the idea of placing the city's dead in vast burial grounds beneath the streets long before the Parisians. As far back as the 2nd century CE, the bodies of Pagans, Jews and early Christians were taken to bespoke caverns excavated underneath Rome. Early Christians preferred burial to the pagan custom of burning but, as Christianity was forbidden by Roman law, they had to place their dead in secret vaults outside the city walls. When Christian persecution finally ended in the 4th century and its followers could practise their faith in the open, Roman Christians continued to use catacombs under the city, right up until the 5th century.

Rome's catacombs represent ancient and dedicated burial sites, much more than just a hall of bones. There are around 60, many of which were only discovered in the last few decades. Five are open to the public: the Catacombs of San Sebastiano, San Callisto, Priscilla, Domitilla and Sant'Agnese, with a combined length of more than 30 miles, containing the remains of thousands of ancient Roman citizens. Individual niches often have name inscriptions, still visible and carved into the stone, and some larger mausoleums have entire families interred. San Callisto is host to Cripta Dei Papi – the Crypt of the Popes – a grander series of graves of holy men, flanked by embossed pillars and vaulted arches. The Catacombs of Priscilla on Via Salaria contains significant Christian frescoes and is a good catacomb to explore first. Ancient artwork lines many catacomb tunnels and the final resting places of more affluent citizens can be particularly elaborate – so much so, it's strange to speak of the Roman and Parisian catacombs in the same context. They're very different experiences.

Image source: Rebecca Partington

Image source: Dnalor 01

UNDERGROUND CHAMBERS

While Paris and Rome can lay claim to the most famous catacombs, others can be found all over the world, and are often given new purpose

Catacombs of Milos

Location: Cyclades, Greece
Time zone: UTC+2
Currency: Euro

For a more exotic location, these catacombs are found on the Greek island of Milos, part of the Cyclades island group. This is an ancient site, carved out of porous volcanic rock into large and impressive halls. Originally serving as burial chambers, the catacombs are now used by the locals as storerooms or a cool and convenient place to keep animals.

Image source: Vihou World

Odessa Catacombs

Location: Odessa, Ukraine
Time zone: UTC+2
Currency: Ukrainian hryvnia

A vast system of caves exists beneath Ukraine's capital city, running some 1,550 miles and connecting many subterranean sites. This began as a series of limestone mines in the 19th century, but they were later connected by smugglers into the labyrinth it is today. It has not been fully mapped, and only a tiny fraction is open to the public.

Saint Francis Monastery

Location: Lima, Peru
Time zone: UTC-5
Currency: Peruvian sol

In the basement of the Basilica y Convento de San Francisco (Saint Francis Monastery) in Lima are crypts with an ossuary containing thousands of skeletons, laid out in macabre mandala and geometric patterns along the walls and set into the floor. It's estimated 25,000 bodies were laid to rest in the catacombs and they date back hundreds of years, though they were only discovered in 1943.

Image source: AgainErick

MAUSOLEUMS OF THE DEAD

No dark tourist can rest until they have visited the perfectly preserved bodies of the 'great leaders of communism'

HO CHI MINH'S MAUSOLEUM

THE RESTING PLACE OF VIETNAMESE REVOLUTIONARY LEADER, HO CHI MINH, IS ONE OF THE MOST VISITED ATTRACTIONS IN HANOI, A TESTAMENT TO HIS ENDURING LEGACY

Location: Hanoi, Vietnam Time zone: UTC+7 Currency: Vietnamese dong

The popular leader of Vietnam, known by his people as Uncle Ho, has been lovingly preserved for them to pay their respects to on a regular basis. For many this is not merely a gruesome way to pass the time, but instead a pilgrimage site that demands veneration. However, it is also high on the list of dark tourist attractions, as well as for 'cult-of-personality' tourists, who often coincide in their choice of holiday destinations.

Like Lenin, Ho Chi Minh did not want a mausoleum, nor did he wish to be embalmed. Rather, he hoped that his body would be cremated and the ashes scattered across his beloved country. Sadly, his body was considered to be too important a symbol and, after the Vietnam War, a magnificent resting place was created to house his corpse. It is a highly impressive edifice, made of grey polished granite in a combination of architectural styles. The giant cube, with its symmetrical columns, perches on a mighty pedestal. Flagpoles flying both communist party and Vietnamese flags flutter in the breeze on either side of a large square situated in front of the mausoleum itself. White-uniformed ceremonial guards goose-step back and forth, and the changing of the guards is similar to the change outside Buckingham Palace.

Behaviour is strictly monitored inside the building: no hands in pockets, no talking and no photography. As visitors file into the main mausoleum hall they are ushered up alongside the glass coffin where they can see his embalmed body and, although the lights are dim, it is possible to see his wiry beard and his hands gently crossed over his breast. This is a perfect site for those who have a morbid desire to witness the dead, but it is also a moving experience for those who appreciate his historical significance.

Image source: Getty

Image source: Getty

Image source: Alamy

LENIN'S TOMB

AS LEADER OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND FIRST HEAD OF THE RESULTANT SOVIET UNION, THE TOMB OF LENIN IS A FAVOURITE DESTINATION FOR DARK TOURISTS EVERYWHERE

Location: Red Square, Moscow, Russia Time zone: UTC+3 Currency: Russian ruble

Vladimir Lenin is widely considered to be one of the most influential and controversial political figures of the 20th century, having instigated the Bolshevik Revolution and ultimately creating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Although he tried to undermine the dictatorial power that the Soviet Government wielded through his 'Testament', his name will forever be linked to his mass-murdering successor, Joseph Stalin and, to this end, his mausoleum has become a popular macabre attraction.

Situated in Moscow's Red Square, Lenin lies within a red granite and black labradorite step-pyramid, frozen in time. This went against his wishes as he did not believe in the process of embalming, but after his passing 10,000 heartbroken citizens sent telegrams to the Soviet Government, begging for his body to be preserved so that they might continue to 'visit' him. The mausoleum was finally unveiled in 1930 and, with the exception of WWII when he was evacuated to Siberia, he has remained on public view ever since.

Sightseers are expected to show utmost respect as they are led into the building under the watchful eyes of guards. The snaking queues take forever, while the experience itself lasts for a fleeting five minutes. Visitors must remain silent as they file past the glass coffin. It's all really rather grim, hence being a perfect location for dark tourists. The body, dressed in a suit and tie, looks vaguely waxy as if he has started to sweat, despite the fact that the room has now included a soft, warm light to give him a more lifelike appearance. Specialist embalmers weekly bleach his skin to remove mold and fungus, and every 18 months his body is given a chemical bath. His suit is washed and ironed at the same time. A brief, but worthwhile trip for the morbid traveller.

Image source: Getty

RESTING PLACES OF THE FAMOUS

Dark tourists are often keen to view the corpses of the famous and infamous, and there are many preserved people to choose from

Kim Il-sung

Location: Pyongyang, North Korea
Time zone: UTC+9
Currency: North Korean won

The founding president of North Korea was embalmed in 1994 and placed in Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, the former official residence of their head of state, and by far the largest mausoleum available to see. His son, Kim Jong-il, can also be seen here within his own glass coffin. Opportunities to enter the palace and view the bodies are limited, however.

Image source: Getty

Mao Zedong

Location: Beijing, China
Time zone: UTC+8
Currency: Yuan renminbi

Chairman Mao has been on display in Beijing's Tiananmen Square since 1977. Although the Chinese people flock in their thousands to pay homage to the 'Great Helmsman', dark tourists are engrossed by the sight of his perfectly embalmed body, draped in a red flag in a crystal coffin. The impressive building faces the legendary gate that leads to the Forbidden City.

Image source: Getty

Eva Perón

Location: Buenos Aires, Argentina
Time zone: UTC-3
Currency: Argentine peso

The controversial wife of Argentinian president Juan Perón was embalmed in 1952 since she was considered to be far too beautiful to bury. Initially she was to be placed at the base of a massive statue, but when a military dictatorship took over, her corpse was smuggled out of the country. She now rests in a secure tomb in Buenos Aires where dark tourists can visit but not gaze upon the body.

Image source: Getty

WEIRD AND WACKY

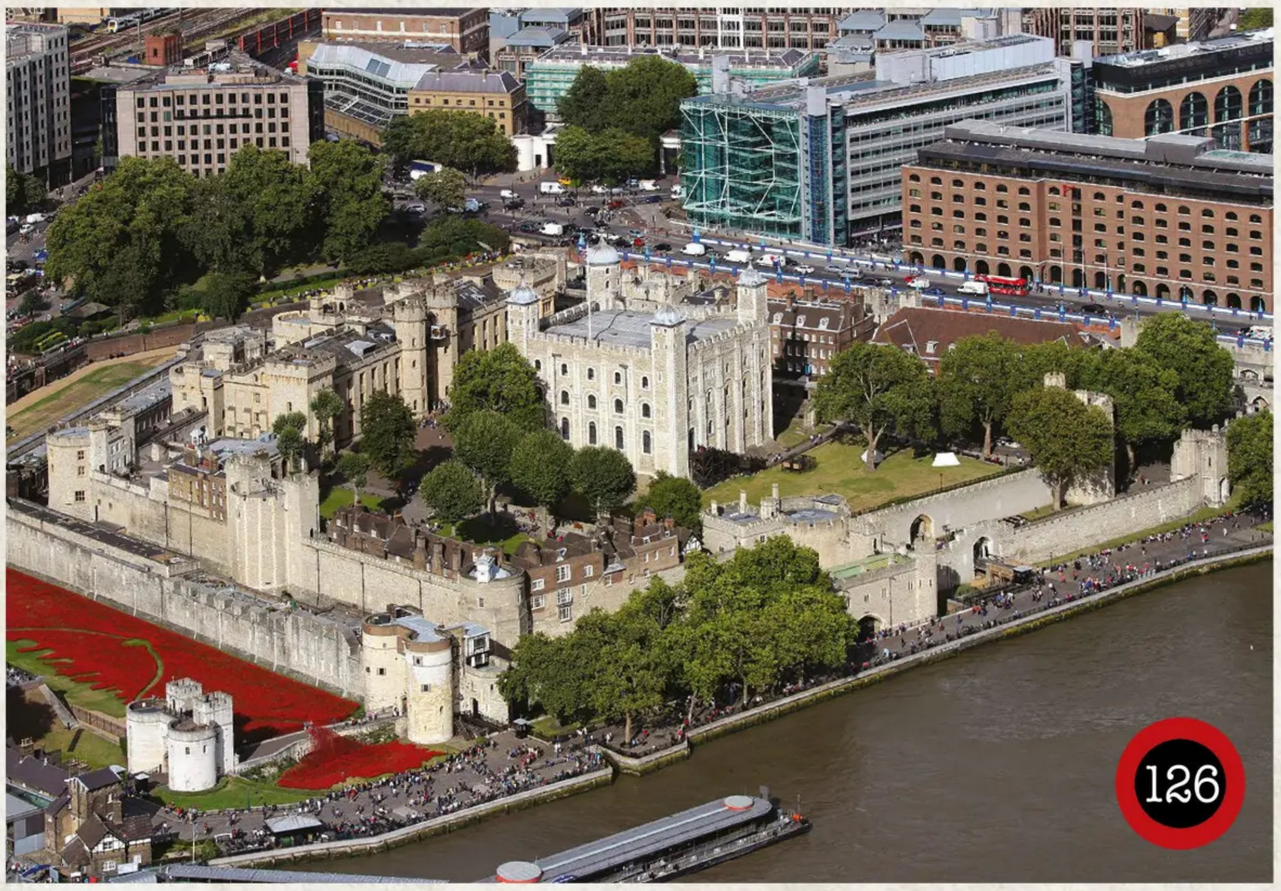
FROM THE UNEXPLAINED TO THE DOWNRIGHT PECULIAR, NOT ALL DARK TOURIST DESTINATIONS ARE SINISTER

112 INSIDE THE WORLD'S HAUNTED CASTLES
Discover the restless legends that lurk in darkened corners of the most menacing castles in Europe

120 WEIRD MUSEUMS
Wander around some of the world's most unusual museums and you'll never see history in quite the same light again

124 DICTATORS' LAIRS
For many, it's a thrill to visit the hidden hideouts of the world's most despised dictators

126 WORLD'S WORST PRISONS
From the cells of notorious crooks to sites of savagery, these prisons are a remind of the worst atrocities of humanity



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The ghost of murdered Agnes Eltz is said to guard the gates of Eltz Castle in Germany

INSIDE THE WORLD'S HAUNTED CASTLES

DISCOVER THE RESTLESS LEGENDS THAT LURK IN DARKENED CORNERS OF THE MOST MENACING CASTLES IN EUROPE

As the Sun sets, its light extinguished by the rising horizon, darkness descends and a looming oblivion pulls all in sight into its oppressive grip. The witching hour is close. Buildings and places that are innocuous by day assume a sinister veil, as dreams and nightmares occupy the minds of those sleeping nearby. Across Europe, some of the most haunted castles start to come to life, their corridors ringing with the shrieks of their long-dead residents, dungeons still echoing with the moans and groans of its last victims and the gardens trampled by the memory of demonic animals.

For thousands of ghost hunters across the world, the thrill of catching a glimpse of these ghostly shapes is too thrilling to resist. As the night descends and the castles unveil their dark reality, the spectre-seekers descend, hoping to catch a vital piece of evidence to prove the existence of our paranormal companions.

Some ghost stories concern the famously wronged of history, such as the tale of the Pink Lady of Stirling Castle, rumoured to be the ghost of Mary, Queen of Scots, who was crowned there in 1543. The Green Lady, who also walks Stirling's corridors, is said to have been Mary's maidservant before she moved into the spiritual realm. Haunting isn't the only source of fear in these castles; in the case of Corvin Castle in Romania, it's the rumoured visit of one Vlad the Impaler during his lifetime that brings a chill to visitors. A reconstructed torture chamber adds to the creepy atmosphere.

Elsewhere, it is the spectres of long-forgotten maids, footmen and peripheral aristocracy that play a part in some of the most evocative ghost tales. Whether you believe in ghosts or not, the spooks most often stem from legends and historical stories that add colour to any visit to these looming fortresses.

Over the next few pages discover some of the most notorious haunted castles across Europe, from the demon-stalked Leap Castle in Ireland to Moosham Castle in Austria, better known as the Witches' Castle, after its terrifying role in the Salzburg Witch Trials.

CHÂTEAU DE BRISSAC

THE SCREAMS OF CHARLOTTE DE BREZE AND HER LOVER HAUNT THE CORRIDORS OF CHATEAU DE BRISSAC

The gloriously ornate Château de Brissac has dominated the Loire Valley for centuries. Built initially as a castle in the 11th century, it was rebuilt in the 1400s, and then again in 1611. It is this 17th-century style that we see today, commissioned by the first Duke of Brissac, Charles II de Cossé. However, behind this impressive Baroque façade, the hidden secrets of the château's tragic past are kept.

A double murder that took place in the 15th century has haunted residents, with the vision of the Green Lady terrifying visitors. After the château was rebuilt in the 1400s, Jacques de Brezé, the son of the man that commissioned the redesign, inherited the building. Jacques married a woman named Charlotte, the favoured illegitimate daughter of Charles VII of France. Yet their marriage had not been a happy one. Despite having five children, Charlotte's eye wandered, landing upon her husband's huntsman, Pierre de Lavergne, and a frenzied affair began.

According to legend, Jacques walked in on his wife and her lover intertwined. It was the final straw. Here, records become murky. Some claim that the lovers were murdered on the spot, with over one hundred blows from Jacques's sword delivering them to their messy deaths. However, others claim that Jacques waited, murdering the pair separately. In this story, Charlotte was allegedly killed in the château's chapel, brutally strangled by the cuckold.

Hearing of his half-sister's murder, King Louis X flew into a rage. Jacques was arrested and sentenced to death. Yet before Jacques could meet his end, Charles VIII, Louis XI's successor, overturned the accusation and Jacques survived.

To this day, the ghost of Charlotte has been spotted roaming the tower in the chapel. Known as the Green Lady, her apparitions have terrified visitors, and it's claimed that half of her face has already rotted away, a blackened corpse with empty eye sockets and no nose. Those that have been (un)fortunate enough to stay in one of the suites that are available to overnight guests have remarked that they've heard dying screams and moans of the murdered couple along the corridors in the early hours of the morning.

Below: The 17th-century style seen today was commissioned by Charles II de Cossé

Below right: Charles II de Cossé was given money by Henry IV of France to rebuild the château

Below left: The small theatre at the château bears a chilling display

Image source: Jimmy44

LOCATION

TIME ZONE

UTC+1

CURRENCY

Euro

TOP TIP

Tours are only done in French, but you can find printed guides in various languages at the ticket desk.

CORVIN CASTLE

Step inside the castle where one of the most notorious princes was held prisoner

Location: Hunedoara, Romania **Time zone:** UTC+3 **Currency:** Romanian Leu

The truth about the history of Translyvania's Corvin Castle can be hard to pin down. Steeped in creepy lore and lurching legend, perhaps its most famous connection is to Vlad the Impaler, Romania's ruthless 15th-century prince of Wallachia. The prince was known for his trademark move, impaling his enemies on stakes, which was perfected while pursuing control of Wallachia. The region had been wrested from his father by nobles who later assassinated him. Meanwhile, Vlad and his younger brother were away at the court of Ottoman Sultan Murad II, as collateral to their father's support for Ottoman policies.

Above: Vlad was rumoured to be a prisoner of Corvin Castle

Below: Stained glass window showsJohn Hunyadi

While many will controversially think of Bran Castle as the home of the infamous Vlad the Impaler, Corvin Castle's link to the famous inspiration for Dracula is also a difficult one to verify. The popular story goes that Vlad, imprisoned in the castle's dungeon for years, was driven insane there and became darker in his thoughts than ever before. It has never been proven, however, that the prince was held prisoner there, but it is thought that if he were, it was only for a few months. Either way, the dungeon in which Vlad would have been held in is open for visitors.

Along with this mystery, the castle holds plenty of spooks, from a torture chamber – complete with waxworks to demonstrate the gruesome instruments – to a deep well with a chilling legend of its own. Three Turkish men imprisoned at the castle built the well, and Iancu of Hunedoara (also known as John Hunyadi), the castle's owner, told them that if they struck water, they would be freed. They did, and while Hunedoara had his well, he reneged and still did not grant them freedom.

One of the prisoners reportedly wrote the message: "You now have water, but you don't have a heart" to their host on the side of the well wall.

Image source: Cristian Bortes

Three Turkish men imprisoned in the castle were left for dead after digging a well for the owner, Iancu of Hunedoara

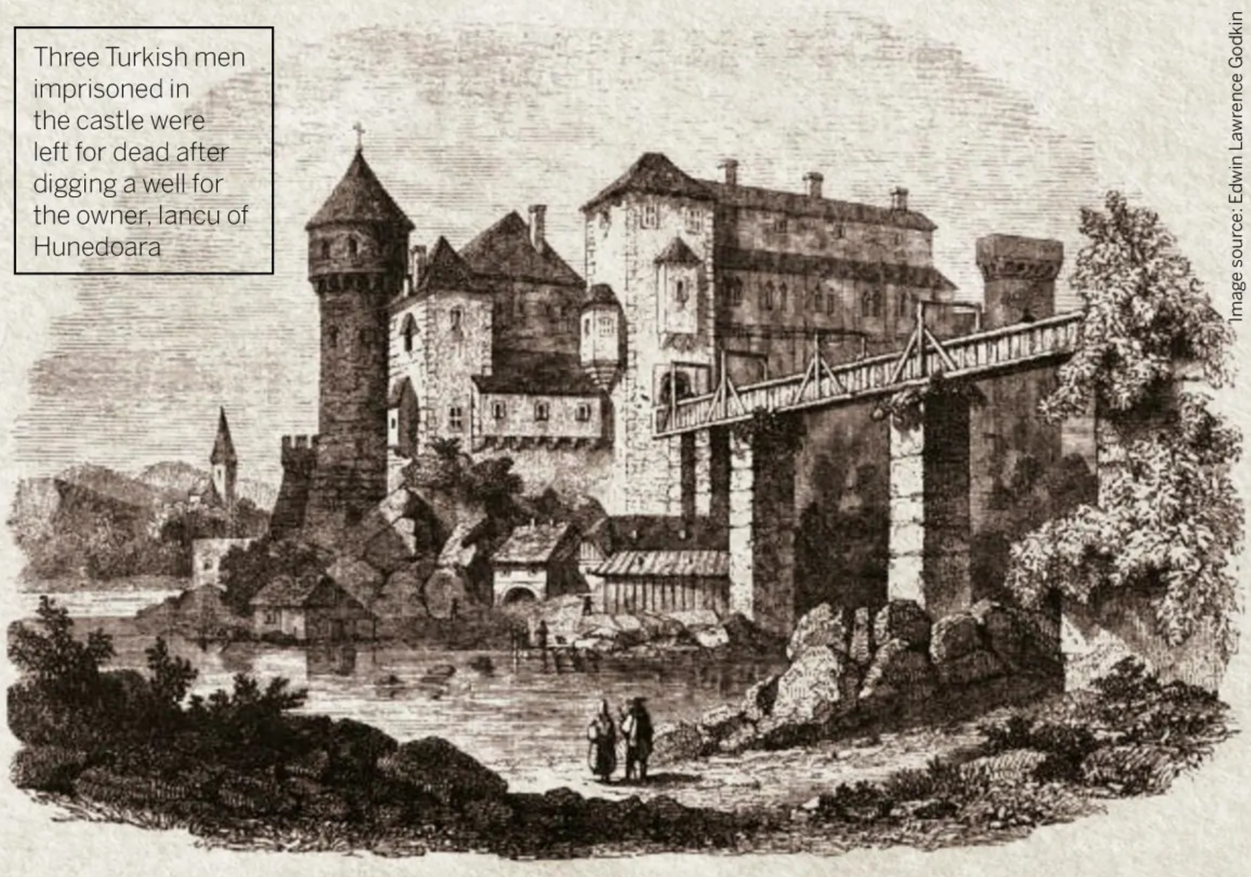
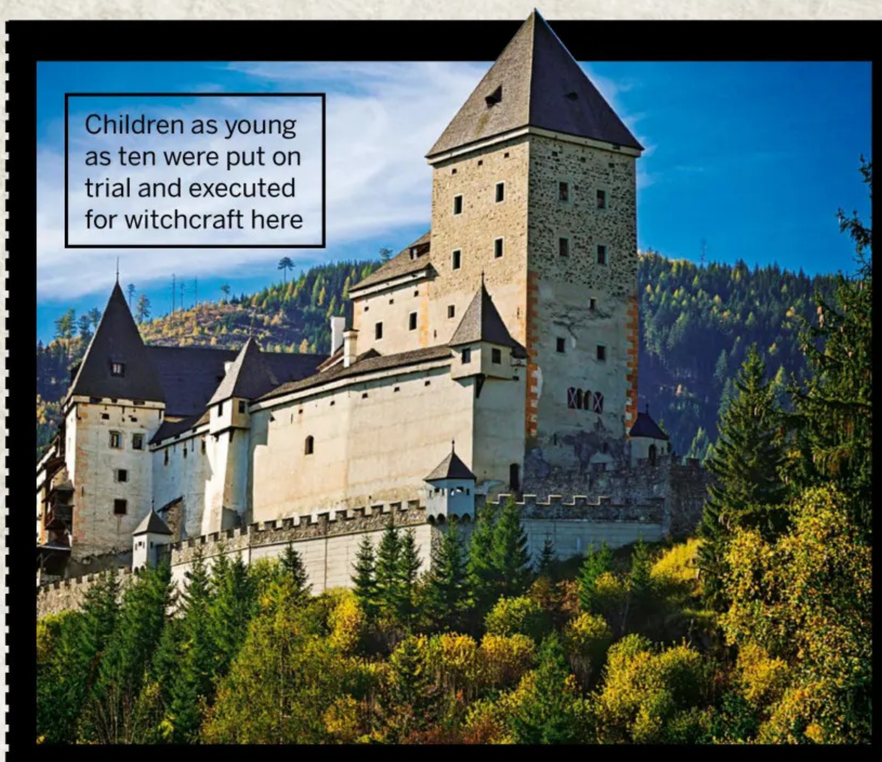


Image source: Edwin Lawrence Godkin



Children as young as ten were put on trial and executed for witchcraft here

MOOSHAM CASTLE

The Witches' Castle was at the heart of one of the most brutal and bloody trials in history

Location: Salzburg, Austria
Time zone: UTC+1 Currency: Euro

With a history that stems all the way back to the 12th century, it's no surprise that Moosham Castle has a past that would send shivers down any spine.

Popularly known as the Witches' Castle, Moosham was home to some of the darkest moments in Austrian history. Between 1675 and 1690, its spooky walls were at the heart of the Salzburg Witch Trials, where those accused of witchcraft were tried, tortured and condemned. Over the 15 years of trials, more than 130 people were condemned to death, while countless more suffered horrific torture, brutality and abuse at the hands of their captors.

Curiously, most of the people tried and accused of witchcraft were men, and the accusers weren't particular about who their accusations fell upon – those who were executed varied from ten years old all the way up to 80. Arguably those that weren't executed faced a worse fate than those who were killed. Thousands were tortured, each branded with a poker-hot iron that scarred them for life. Until their dying day, they were marked as a witch. Other torture methods involved chopping off the hands of those accused. The lucky ones would be those that were burned at the stake – whether alive or already dead from the cruelty that was inflicted upon them.

Most of those accused of witchcraft were beggars, paupers and the homeless. One particularly unfortunate beggar, a 12-year-old boy, became known as Wizard Jackl. The government fiercely hunted him after he disappeared following the execution of his mother in 1675. Despite hearing rumours of the boy's death two years later, the government rounded up his friends on the streets under the accusation that they'd been taught black magic by their long-gone friend. Under torture, the children told tales of Jackl's power and barbarity, claiming that he could make himself invisible, eventually convincing the government that they'd rather not find the boy.

Horrifically, Moosham's connection to the Salzburg Witch Trials isn't the only mystical experience. In the 19th century, hundreds of deer and cattle were found dead all around the castle. Naturally many residents leapt to the conclusion that werewolves were responsible for their deaths, and several castle residents were tried and executed under the pretence that they were werewolves.

To this day, the castle is host to several paranormal presences. Those who have visited the castle claim to have felt someone breathing on them, while others claim to have been touched by some invisible being. More frequently, bangs, footsteps and apparitions have been reported.

Image source: Kim Traynor

DRAGSHOLM CASTLE

ONE OF DENMARK'S OLDEST CASTLES IS HOME TO MORE THAN 100 GHOSTS

Built in about 1215 by the Bishop of Rosilde, Dragsholm Castle's history is as rich and interesting as it is morbid. During the Middle Ages, the castle was overhauled and thoroughly fortified, making it the strongest castle at the time. As a testament to its strength, it stood resolute against the fiercely destructive armies of Christoffer, Count of Oldenburg, during the Count's Feud of 1534 to 1536.

After the Reformation that followed, Dragsholm Castle fell into the hands of the state, where it was transformed into a prison for noble and high-ranking prisoners. Here, each prisoner received a cell built especially for them, while cells in the north east tower of the castle were equipped with toilets and windows.

Perhaps the most infamous prisoner of Dragsholm Castle was James Hepburn, 4th earl of Boswell, the third husband of Mary, Queen of Scots. Caught in Norway in 1573, the earl found himself transported to Dragsholm on the order of King Frederik II of Denmark. Here, he was tied to a pillar and was provided with only enough food and water to keep him alive. It's alleged that he went insane, dying almost five years after he was captured. His ghost is still said to haunt the castle, with witnesses claiming to have seen the disgraced Earl of Boswell riding into the courtyard on his horse and carriage, the sound of the horse's hooves audible across the castle.

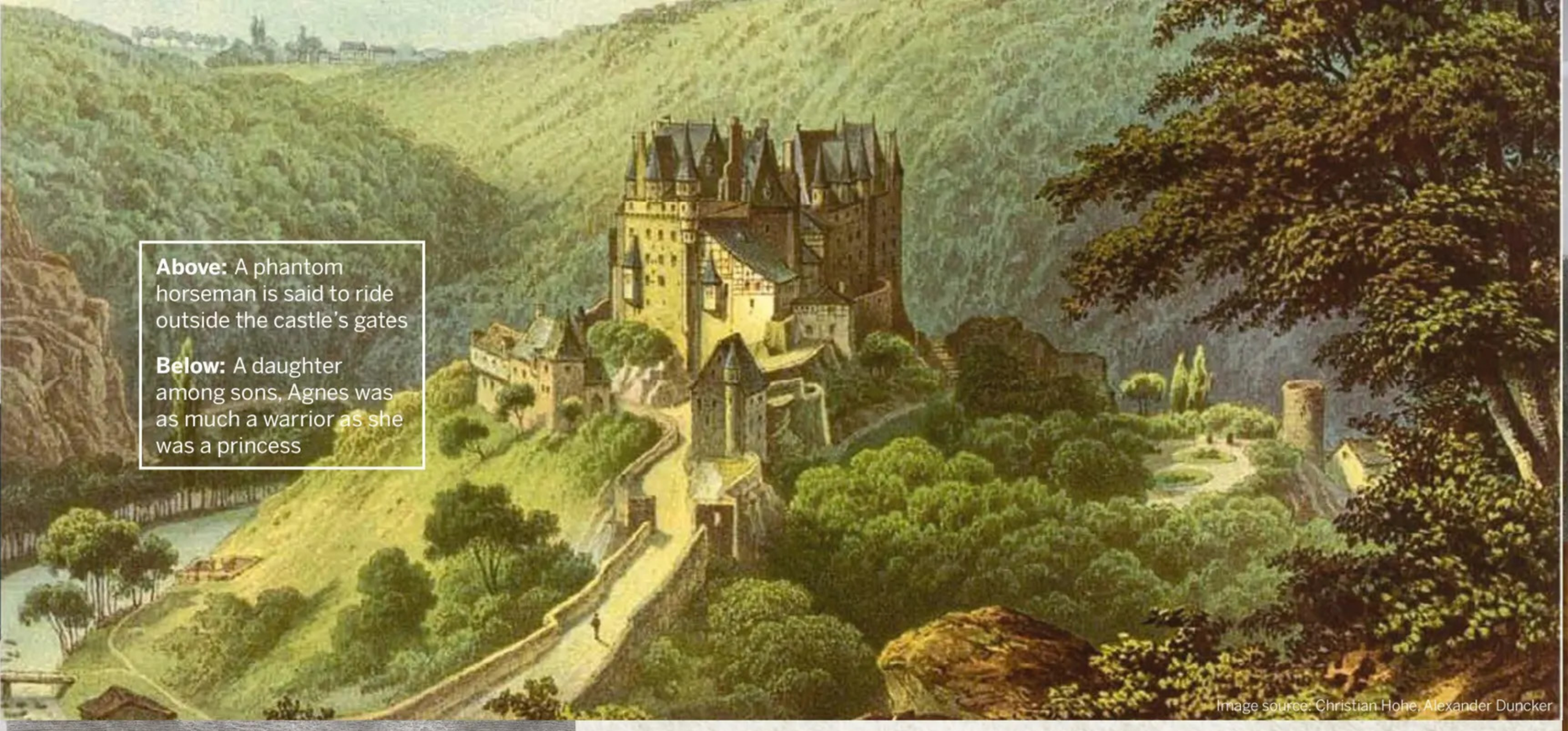
Above: The ghost of James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell and third husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, is said to roam the castle

Inset (top): The castle was used as a prison for noble and high-ranking criminals

Inset (bottom): Today, visitors can dine in the atmospheric castle

As well as James Hepburn, there are apparently more than 99 other ghosts that frequent the castle's hallways. The Mad Squire, a noble-born Dane who died at the castle, has been heard moaning from the dungeons of the castle, while there are two ladies who haunt the corridors, one a disgraced daughter of a noble, the other a grateful worker. The Grey Lady, who had worked in the castle for years, went to work one day complaining of toothache. Her master had given her some relief for the pain, but tragically the woman died. Yet thankful for the help her master had offered her, she stuck around.

The White Lady, however, met her maker after disgracing her father. Calina Bovles, the daughter of a noble, had fallen in love with a mere commoner and had become pregnant with his child. As evidence of her liaison grew, her father realised the atrocity that she had committed and locked her in a room until she died. Incidentally, during renovations, the skeleton of a woman wearing a white dress was uncovered in the 20th century.



Above: A phantom horseman is said to ride outside the castle's gates

Below: A daughter among sons, Agnes was as much a warrior as she was a princess

Image source: Christian Hohe, Alexander Duncker

Image source: Gun Powder Ma

Image source: Paul Pützhofen-Hambüchen

ELTZ CASTLE

THE GHOST OF AGNES ELTZ PACES THE CASTLE GROUNDS, A DEFENDER OF HER HOME UNTIL HER DEATH AND BEYOND

Location: Wierschem, Germany **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

If you visit the 12th-century castle at Eltz, you'll have to pass through the guarded gates at its entrance. This guard, though not visible to all, has paced the grounds of Eltz since her brutal death many centuries ago.

Owned by the same family that built the fortress 33 generations ago, the castle was once home to a young lady named Agnes Eltz. A daughter among many sons, Agnes grew up around the 16th century, pretending to be a warrior with her brothers rather than a princess. But like may girls of her age and status, Agnes was destined for an arranged marriage from a young age. Her parents' spouse of choice was the knight of Braunsberg. The pair met several times, but the young girl dismissed him as boring and chose to ignore him. One day, infuriated by her lack of interest, the knight grabbed Agnes and forced himself upon her. Outraged, Agnes pushed him away and slapped him round the face – a great embarrassment for her family. The knight's patience had worn thin, and her slap pushed him over the edge. He stormed out of Eltz Castle, vowing revenge for her devious behaviour.

For months, the Eltz family lived in fear of an attack – but it didn't come. Lulled into a sense of security, the family resumed their usual lives. But the knight hadn't forgotten. For months he stewed in his resentment, plotting how to take revenge on the slight of Agnes. One day, when the Eltz men went out hunting, Braunsberg and his soldiers stormed the castle, killing the guardsmen and attacking anyone in sight. Agnes, more the brave soldier than a fragile maiden, leapt into action, donning her brother's suit of armour and storming out to attack the knight. Braunsberg fought back, dealing her a fatal blow to the chest. It was only after the battle that the knight realised that the ferocious warrior he'd killed was his own betrothed. He fled.

As the ghost of Agnes defends her castle, people have reported a phantom horseman riding outside the castle gates – the apparition of the knight of Braunsberg – seeking forgiveness.

Image source: Fritz Geller-Grimm

Image source: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed

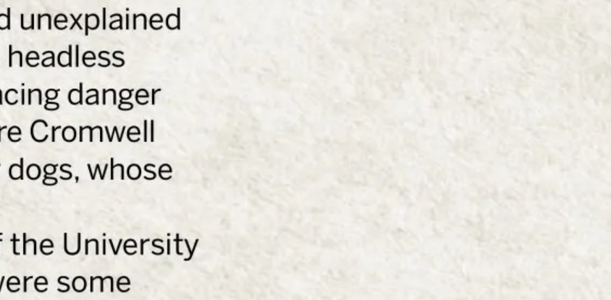
Above: The ghost of Agnes patrols the castle, protecting it from further attack

Above right: The castle has remained home to the Eltz family for 33 generations

EDINBURGH CASTLE

One of the UK's most haunted sites, Edinburgh Castle is home to several spectres

Location: Edinburgh, Scotland **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound Sterling



Set foot in the grounds of Edinburgh Castle and you might hear the soft whistle of pipes, seemingly playing from right beneath your feet. This tune is apparently the haunting memory of the Lone Piper, who disappeared on an errand hundreds of years ago. Upon discovering secret tunnels under the castle, a young boy was sent to investigate. Instructed to play his pipes continually, the piper stepped in, his pipes a sign of his progress. When his music suddenly stopped, a search party was released – but there was no sign of the boy.

Just one of the many ghosts to haunt Edinburgh Castle, it is no wonder the area is considered to be so haunted. The site where Edinburgh Castle stands was inhabited long before the chapel dedicated to Saint Margaret was built in the 12th century. As long ago as 850 BCE, the area has been home to settlements, with a defensive fortress standing during the Iron Age. The castle that now stands features buildings constructed between the 12th and 18th century, but while it started life as a royal residence, it was later turned into a prison and an army garrison. Its dungeons, however, led the castle to notoriety. Here, prisoners were kept tucked away and often forgotten. These forgotten prisoners often appear to visitors in the form of cold spots, shadows and unexplained moving objects. Another common spectre is the headless drummer boy, who appears when the castle is facing danger – the first reporting of the boy was in 1650, before Cromwell attacked. The castle is also allegedly haunted by dogs, whose phantom forms roam the dog cemetery.

An investigation launched by Dr Wiseman of the University of Hertfordshire in 2001 confirmed that there were some peculiar goings-on at Edinburgh Castle. Over the course of ten days, 240 volunteers with no knowledge of the castle's paranormal history were sent into both haunted and unhaunted areas of the castle with equipment to detect or record evidence of their experiences. The results were incredible – apparitions were spotted, and some sceptics reported that there was some kind of physical contact in the vaults and tunnels. Dr Wiseman, who had previously claimed that he didn't "believe" in ghosts, explained ambiguously, "I'm closer to being a lot more curious."

Below: The castle is home to the spirits of forgotten prisoners

Image source: Ad Meskens

Leap Castle is supposedly built above the crossing of two Ley lines

LEAP CASTLE

A family feud gone wrong left Leap Castle as the most haunted site in Ireland

Location: Co. Offaly, Ireland
Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Euro

Claimed to be the most haunted site in all of Ireland, Leap Castle hides a dark and treacherous past behinds its walls. Allegedly built on the site of a druid initiation site, which was chosen for being the crossing of two Ley lines, it is claimed that the barrier between the physical and spiritual realms are particularly thin here, resulting in paranormal activity that exaggerated the aura – both good and bad.

Even before it was built, the castle was bathed in blood, condemning the site to negative paranormal activity. Built by the O'Bannon clan in the 13th century, the family was in the midst of a dilemma – two brothers contested each other's claim as chieftain. To solve the issue, both brothers jumped into a rocky gorge, the survivor taking the title.

Merely 200 years later, the Earl of Kildare attempted to seize the castle several times, the last attempt succeeding in destroying part of it. The castle soon landed in the lap of the O'Carroll clan. The O'Carrolls, too, were engaged in a serious sibling rivalry. Following the death of the chieftain in 1532, two sons feuded over the right to lead. One a warrior, the other a priest, both claimed that it was their right. One day, as the priest held mass for some family, his brother stormed in. Outraged that the priest had started the mass before all the family had arrived, he leapt towards the priest and plunged his sword straight through his heart. The priest collapsed over his altar, soaking it in his blood. To this day, the ghost of the priest has been seen around the chapel.

It's not just the priest whose spirit remains at Leap Castle. The ghosts of two young girls have been spotted at the site. Usually seen playing together, others have reported witnessing one of the girls falling from the battlements, while the other has been seen dragging a deformed leg behind her. These sisters, Emily and Charlotte, were thought to have lived there in the 1600s.

More inexplicable, perhaps, is the hybrid phantom that roams the grounds. Apparently as big as a sheep, but with the face of a human, this demon emits the foul stench of rotting flesh. If that's not bad enough, in place of eyes, the demon has empty, black pools. Nobody can explain its terrifying presence, but it has since been named the Elemental, and some theories claim that the spirit calls back to the days of the druids. Thankfully it's said that the Elemental doesn't appear unless you provoke it.

Even today, the castle's current owner, Sean Ryan, reports curious goings on. Currently undergoing renovations, Sean has reported that ladders have been pushed from walls, as well as other unexplained accidents that have resulted in workers' broken limbs.

LOCATION

TIME ZONE

UTC+1

CURRENCY

Czech koruna

TOP TIP

If you want to arrange to stay the night, get in touch with the castle directly – they've been known to give permission.

Image source: Lukáš Kalista

Image source: Lukáš Kalista

HOUSKA CASTLE

BUILT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, WITH NO ACCESS TO WATER AND SEEMINGLY NO PURPOSE, HOUSKA CASTLE HIDES A VERY SINISTER SECRET

About 50 kilometres away from Prague stands a castle that seemingly serves absolutely no purpose. Houska Castle was built in the 14th century by the Bohemian ruler Ottokar II. The castle changed hands several times, enjoying a Renaissance redesign in the late-16th century, before falling into disrepair in the 18th century. By the 20th century, the curious legend of Houska Castle had attracted the attention of one particular group of people: the Nazis.

Unlike other fortresses of the period, it wasn't meant to house the king. The castle wasn't near any trading route and there was no access to water. Defences were built inside the castle rather than outside – instead of keeping people out, it seemed like the castle was meant to trap something else in.

According to lore, this apparently pointless construction was, in fact, built over the gates of hell. A bottomless hole had existed at Houska for centuries, a gateway for demons and evil beings to enter Earth and terrorise people. The area has long been avoided by locals, and even to this day the castle is given a wide berth, with only the inquisitive daring to set foot in Houska Castle.

Above: The chapel walls, adorned with many frescoes

Above right: A chapel dedicated to Archangel Michael is built over the 'gateway to hell'

Below left: The curious legends of the castle attracted the occultist experiments of the Nazis

Below: Ottokar II of Bohemia commissioned the very first stone structure on the site

Above this fateful hole stands the chapel, dedicated to none other than the leader of God's army, Archangel Michael. The chapel itself is remarkable for more than just its guarding presence. Frescoes decorate the walls – but their gory tales give an insight into what lurks below, with left-handed demons clawing their way out of the scenes.

However, before the chapel's construction, the hole was involved in some sinister experiments. Attempts were made to fill the hole with rocks, but no matter how many rocks were thrown in, the hole never seemed to fill. It's alleged that one duke was keen to get to the bottom of the hole's mystery. He summoned prisoners who had been condemned to death and offered them a full pardon if they agreed to be lowered into the hole. Many agreed, expecting to escape with their lives. They were mistaken. There was silence as one man was lowered down. Moments later, his uncontrollable screams echoed up from the depths of the hole. As he was hauled back out, they discovered his hair had turned white and he'd aged several decades. They never found out what was in the hole – it drove the prisoner to madness, and he died days later.

Houska Castle is home to many more secrets than the gates of hell, however. Many visitors claim to have experienced supernatural encounters, from the ghost of a woman that stalks the corridors, to curious animal-like presences. It's these stories and supernatural sightings that struck a chord with the Nazis. From 1939 to 1945, Houska Castle was home to occult experiments, but records were destroyed and it's not known what happened here. However, several skeletons of Nazi officers were discovered during renovations. Their own comrades had executed them.

WEIRD MUSEUMS

WANDER ROUND SOME OF THE WORLD'S DARKEST, MOST UNUSUAL MUSEUMS AND YOU'LL NEVER SEE HUMANS IN QUITE THE SAME LIGHT AGAIN

Image source: Stanislav Kozlovskiy

Kunstkamera means 'cabinet of curiosities', and one of its 'curiosities' is this child with the rare congenital disorder of cyclopia

KUNSTKAMERA

Visit the Russian equivalent of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum

Location: St Petersburg, Russia
Time zone: UTC+3 **Currency:** Russian ruble

The Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, to give it its full and rather cumbersome name, has collections built up over centuries, for it is now over 300 years old. Originally it comprised of fishes, birds and reptiles, preserved in flasks, but there were also items considered 'freaks' of nature that had been gathered by Peter the Great at the end of the 17th century. Stranger items at the museum include a pipe made out of a human tibia, a late-19th-century wooden mask that has used people's teeth, and human eyeballs from the late 17th or early 18th centuries.

Image source: Alex 'Florstein' Fedorov

Image source: Derek Blackadder

Image source: Michael Homan

Above: A clutter of artefacts in one of the Voodoo Museum's two rooms

Main: Visitors to voodoo queen Marie Laveau's family crypt in New Orleans. The Voodoo Museum arranges walking tours here

THE NEW ORLEANS HISTORIC VOODOO MUSEUM

Learn more about this Louisiana city's voodoo history and culture

Location: New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
Time zone: UTC -5 **Currency:** US dollar

In the heart of New Orleans's famous French Quarter is this two-roomed museum dedicated to the city's voodoo culture. Established in 1972, it makes clear that it has a two-fold purpose – to educate visitors while also entertaining them. It offers the usual range of relics, paintings, sculptures and other objects, with its artefacts cluttered together, thus requiring a bit of study to distinguish one object from another. However, it also runs walking tours to the nearby Saint Louis Cemetery Number One, which contains the tomb of voodoo 'queen' Marie Laveau, as well as offering psychic readings, rituals and ceremonies through contact with local practitioners.

Image source: Ignis

Find out about underground life in Paris, by visiting its sewers. Earlier tourists were ferried around by boat

PARIS SEWERS MUSEUM

Get deep down and dirty under the Parisian streets

Location: Paris, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

The Musée des Égouts de Paris, or the Paris Sewers Museum, encourages visitors to learn more about what's below our feet – the thousands of miles of sewers that carry water, sewage and cables to and away from us, making our above-ground lives more pleasant. The idea of tourists visiting sewers is nothing new in this city – in previous times, visitors were transported through these underground passageways via cart, carriage or boat! The museum is currently closed for renovations, so look out for its reopening, when you can become part of the Parisian underworld.

Image source: Alamy

The exterior of the small, rather pretty museum at Eyam belies the terrible story of its people in the 17th century

EYAM MUSEUM

Learn about how one village's residents died of bubonic plague

Location: Eyam, Derbyshire, UK
Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling

It covers a very dark period of local history, yet it sees thousands of schoolchildren visit each year, and prides itself on the positive reaction they give. The Eyam Museum tells the story of how one of the 17th-century residents of this Derbyshire village unwittingly brought the bubonic plague back with him from a trip to London, unleashing disease and death on his neighbours. Nearly 300 villagers died from the plague as a result, sacrificing themselves by putting their village into quarantine so other communities would not suffer. The museum includes audio-visual material, waxworks and the ubiquitous gift shop.

Image source: Museum of Jurassic Technology (photo credit: Jennifer Bastian)

MUSEUM OF JURASSIC TECHNOLOGY

An imaginative, eclectic, reversioning of the 'cabinet of curiosities'

Location: Culver City, California, USA
Time zone: UTC-8 **Currency:** US dollar

The brainchild of a husband and wife team – David Hildebrand Wilson and Diana Drake Wilson – this small museum near Los Angeles presents a mix of exhibits that it claims will advance our knowledge of the Lower Jurassic period. In reality, experts have doubts as to the authenticity of some of the items, and it is considered by some to simply be an 'homage' to historic cabinets of curiosities. There is a collection of artefacts taken from local trailer parks, a set of decomposing dice and examples of old cures and remedies... and 25,000 people a year visit it.

Image source: Rob Wilcox

Image source: Alamy

Eugene Belgrand, chief engineer of the city's water and sewage system, is commemorated at the Musée des égouts

VANCOUVER POLICE MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

Journey round a morgue-turned-museum

Location: Vancouver, Canada
Time zone: UTC-8 **Currency:** Canadian dollar

From autopsy tables to the casts of skulls of murder victims and examples of the items left behind at crime scenes, learn about the seedy and criminal side of Vancouver life at this museum, situated, rather appropriately, in the city's former Coroner's Court and morgue. There is some quite graphic coverage of former murder cases as well as morgue freezers on display, but it really brings to life the reality of violent deaths, and investigations into them. Original photos, archive material and artefacts create an absorbing – yet unpleasant – experience, where death never seems never far away...

THE MUSEUM OF THE MUMMIES

Its mummies are reminders of a 19th-century cholera epidemic

Location: Guanajuato, Mexico
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** Mexican peso

El Museo de las Momias – the Museum of the Mummies – was opened 50 years ago, but it wouldn't exist if it wasn't for an earlier tax. This tax was payable on bodies, and when some families didn't pay the tax, the bodies were disinterred. Many of these bodies were the victims of a cholera outbreak in the area in the 1830s. Some were taken to a local building to be stored, and the dry climate led to them being mummified naturally. Soon, cemetery workers started to charge locals to look at the bodies; today, you can see some 60 of them.

Image source: Fernandohv

Guanajuato's Museum of the Mummies has around 60 mummies on display, and its total collection is nearly double that. One mummy is that of a young child

Image source: Getty

Thousands of people visit the museum in Lima each year to see its collections of brains and foetuses

THE BRAIN MUSEUM

This Peruvian museum has been collecting deformed brains since 1947

Location: Lima, Peru
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** Peruvian sol

Ever wanted to look at a range of abnormal brains? Well, this museum is perfect for you. Located in Lima, the Brain Library – also known as the Brain Museum – at the Neurological Sciences Institute of the Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo Hospital contains nearly 3,000 brains, of which around 300 are on display. There is also a collection of foetuses. The collection is primarily designed to help neurology students with their knowledge, and is divided into three sections: one looks at neuroanatomy, another studies birth defects and the third investigates the effect of disease on the brain.

Neuropathologist Dr Diana Rivas stands in front of some of the specimens held at the brain museum in Lima

Image source: Getty

Image source: PersianDutchNetwork

Image source: CLI

A 'flute of shame' in the Torture Museum. It was used to punish bad musicians

TORTURE MUSEUM

From the rack to the skullcracker, this Dutch museum has it all

Location: Amsterdam, Netherlands
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

In earlier centuries, European countries were home to scaffolds and gallows, inquisitions and executioners. In the Netherlands, this dark history is remembered in its Torture Museum, situated opposite the Flower Market in Amsterdam, which features more than 40 instruments of punishment, taken from different European countries. These include such items as the inquisition chair, the rack, the skullcracker and the rather bizarre-looking Judas Cradle. The aim is to educate visitors about the use of torture and the death penalty, not just in history, but looking at how it is still being employed in modern-day societies.

One artefact at the museum is this leg bone, which has been affected by osteoporosis

Image source: Alamy

SIRIRAJ MEDICAL MUSEUM

Nicknamed the 'museum of death', don't expect fun and games here

Location: Bangkok, Thailand
Time zone: UTC+7 **Currency:** Thai baht

The Siriraj Medical Museum is actually a group of small museums at Bangkok's Siriraj Hospital. These comprise pathology, anatomy, parasitology and forensics museums that between them tell us much about life, disease and death. There are body parts taken from murder victims and the mummified remains of Si Quey Sae Urng, a Thai serial killer in the 1950s, who was executed for his crimes. You can also see dissection of the body's nervous and arterial systems, and different forms of multiple births. For more than a century, Siriraj Hospital has gathered a huge collection of artefacts relating to the history of medicine. Note, photography inside the museum is not allowed.

The museum at the Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok provides beautiful views – but its contents are rather less attractive

Image source: Bobby

Image source: Alamy

THE MÜTTER MUSEUM

Find casts of celebrity conjoined twins in the heart of Philadelphia

Location: Philadelphia, USA
Time zone: UTC-5 **Currency:** US dollar

Chang and Eng Bunker were Siamese – or conjoined – twins, born in what is now Thailand in 1811, but they settled in the US and spent much of their lives as touring performers. When they died in 1874, the College of Physicians conducted their autopsies, and specimens were sent to the college's museum, the Mütter Museum. Today, their conjoined livers and a plaster cast of their torsos are on display, part of the museum's large collection of foetal Siamese twin specimens and other artefacts. The Mütter states that it aims to help the public 'appreciate the mysteries and beauty of the human body'.

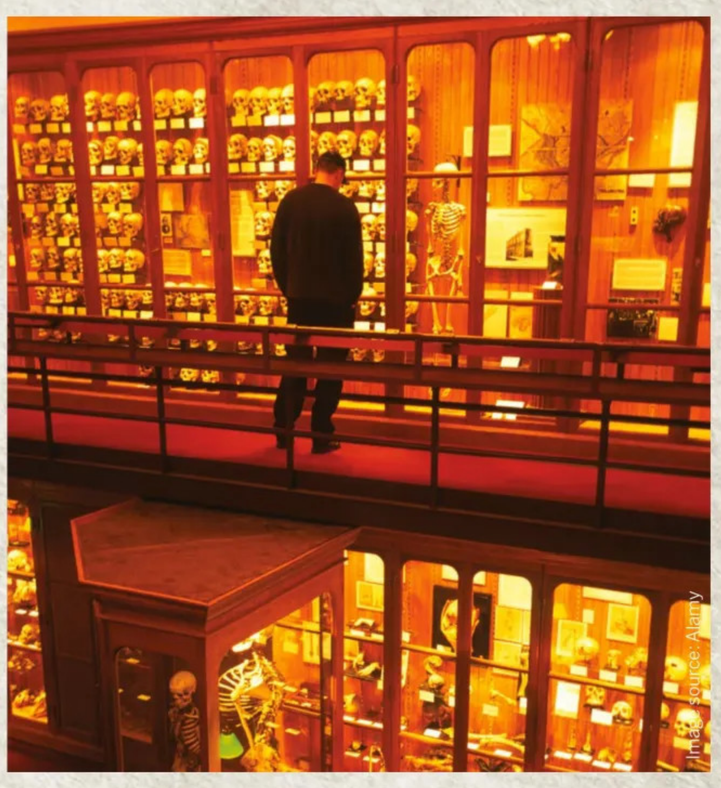


Image source: Alamy

MUSEUM OF HUMAN DISEASE

Learn more about disease and the human body Down Under

Location: Sydney, Australia
Time zone: UTC+10 **Currency:** Australian dollar

Based in the University of New South Wales' School of Medical Sciences, this museum contains a collection of thousands of human tissue specimens, relating to infectious and non-infectious diseases, including HIV and tuberculosis. You can learn about the effects of smoking, alcohol, drugs and obesity on the human body, all as a result of these specimens, which have been taken from surgical removal or autopsies. There are special exhibitions areas and an interactive Medical Computer Discovery Lab on site. Although there is an emphasis on education, with university students being particularly welcomed, the museum is also open to the public. It is closed on weekends and public holidays, so plan your visit accordingly.

HIDEOUTS OF THE DICTATORS

For many dark tourists, it is a thrill to visit the lairs of some of the most hated dictators and despots in history

WOLF'S LAIR – ADOLF HITLER

Steeped in Nazi history, Wolf's Lair is a top destination site for dark tourists

Location: Poland **Time zone:** UTC+1
Currency: Polish złoty

Hidden in the forests of north-eastern Poland, Wolf's Lair attracts more than 20,000 visitors annually who wish to walk in the footsteps of Hitler and his high-ranking officers. Dark tourists will make for Bunker 13, the Führer's personal shelter, which is comprised of shadowy, sinister corridors and tunnels. The ruins of Bunker 3 are also where Stauffenberg attempted his ill-fated assassination plot. Goring's bunker is the best preserved and brave tourists can climb it to see where the flak gun placements were positioned. Of all the dictator's secret locations, Wolf's Lair is by far the darkest.

ZELENAYA ROSCHA – JOSEPH STALIN

Visit Stalin's summer home, designed specially for the diminutive leader

Location: Sochi, Russia
Time zone: UTC+3
Currency: Russian ruble

Any location associated with Stalin will be a major draw for the tourist who likes his or her holiday on the ghoulish side. Stalin's Dacha, or summer residence, is a purpose-built second home, complete with palm trees imported from California and, tellingly, a series of sniper emplacements that hint at the dictator's paranoid state of mind. Everything, from the furniture to the height of the stair treads, was specifically designed to accommodate the Soviet leader's small stature. The buildings are all green so they can be camouflaged in the forest, and there's a secret lift and tunnel down to the sea. Dark tourists can have their photo taken with a waxwork dummy of the mass murderer at his desk.

VILLA TORLONIA – BENITO MUSSOLINI

The fascist dictator appreciated his home comforts, making this lair particularly opulent

Location: Via Nomentana, Rome, Italy
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

With its tennis courts and personal home cinema, Benito Mussolini's beautiful villa is an impressive sight. The Neoclassical building was the Italian dictator's residence between 1925 and 1943 – he rented it from the wealthy aristocratic Torlonia family. Stained-glass windows, paintings and sculptures can all be viewed, but it is the secret bunker, hidden beneath the wine cellar, that will be of most interest to the dark tourist. The secret cavern, designed to protect the fascist leader during the war, was opened to the public in 2015 and has proven to be a very popular attraction in itself.

PALACIO REAL DE EL PARDO – FRANCISCO FRANCO

Franco's hilltop retreat is similar to Mussolini's Villa Torlonia but less interesting for the Dark Tourist

Location: Madrid, Spain **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Originally designed as a hunting lodge for the King of Spain and then used as a royal palace, El Pardo tours concentrate on King Alfonso XII and his family rather than the darker history of General Francisco Franco. It is, therefore, of little interest to the dark tourist looking for thrills and chills. There is certainly no mention of the 26,000 political prisoners held captive or executed in his name. At the end of the tour, Franco's private quarters can be seen but his affiliation is played down and more time is taken over its function as a hideaway for visiting Heads of State.

Image source: Getty

FACILITY D-0 ARK – JOSIP TITO

The nuclear bunker, known as ARK, was a well-kept secret for decades

Location: Konjic, Bosnia
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Bosnian mark

Hidden behind what appears to be an ordinary house against a craggy mountainside, Josip Tito's control centre for military operations stretches 202 metres into the rock. The labyrinthine complex is built in a horseshoe shape and comprises offices, conference rooms, dormitories and, most interesting to the dark tourist, the former Yugoslav revolutionary's private rooms. It was here, in his own personal bunker, that he kept his family safe with oil, food and water supplies designed to last for up to six months. The gloomy tunnels will delight morbid holiday-makers who are interested in man's darker history.

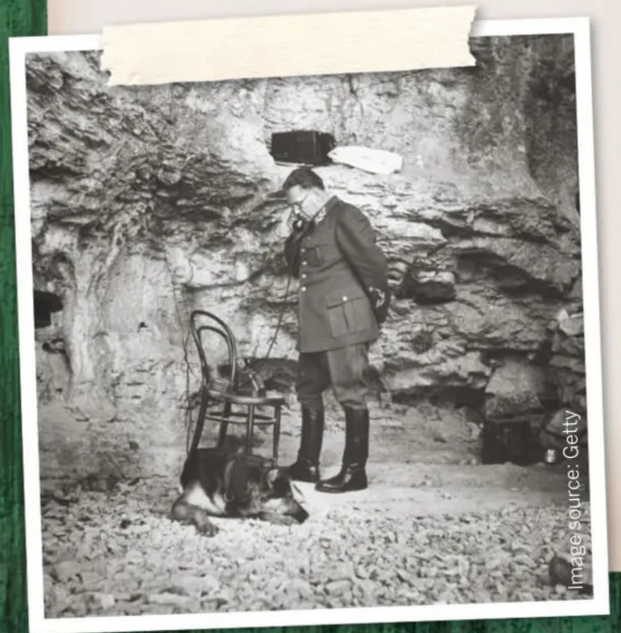


Image source: Getty

EMERGENCY COMMAND POST – JOSEPH STALIN

Stalin was one of the most controversial figures of the 20th century, so visiting his bunker is a must for dark tourists

Location: Moscow, Russia
Time zone: UTC+3 **Currency:** Russian ruble

Constructed under the State Defence Program of the USSR, the Emergency Command Post of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army was connected to the Kremlin via a secret ten-mile underground passageway. A sports stadium was built on top of the bunker as a cover whilst the Georgian-styled structure was being constructed. The bunker now houses a museum where visitors can see the large, domed conference room and Stalin's private office, with his desk, armchair and even his jacket and pipe. The place has the feel of a 1930s time capsule, where Stalin himself might walk around the corner at any moment.

Image source: Alamy

CHÂTEAU DE FONTAINBLEAU – NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

Fontainbleau is the only royal and imperial château to have been continuously inhabited for seven centuries

Location: Paris, France
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

So desperate was he to outdo the magnificent Palace of Versailles with its royal links, the megalomaniac Napoleon Bonaparte spent a considerable fortune renovating the crumbling château. With its 1,500 rooms, more than 1,000 visitors could stay in the castle at any given time, so it was the perfect location for Bonaparte to hold court. Today, the Napoleon Museum is situated in the former apartments of the French ruler, where most of the décor and furnishings have remained intact since his time. Visitors can even see the camp bed that he had set up in his study so that he might rest briefly during long campaigns.

Image source: Carolus

EAGLE'S NEST – ADOLF HITLER

Take a trip out to Hitler's mountaintop retreat

Location: Berchtesgaden, Bavaria, Germany
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Some people would argue that visiting places linked to brutal dictators dishonours those who suffered under their cruel regimes, but travelling to the luxury hideouts of megalomaniacs is definitely becoming a popular choice. One such place, the infamous Eagle's Nest, can be reached via Hitler's brass elevator car. At 124 metres long, the elevator, which is drilled into the side of the mountain, pulls visitors up through the clouds, offering dramatic views of the Bavarian scenery. It is easy to become caught up in the magnificent panorama and forget exactly who owned the retreat and what its purpose was. It was here that Adolf Hitler received visiting dignitaries during his insane quest for world domination. Today, it is used as an information centre and restaurant, although only the darkest of dark tourists would feel comfortable eating here.

Image source: DennisPeters

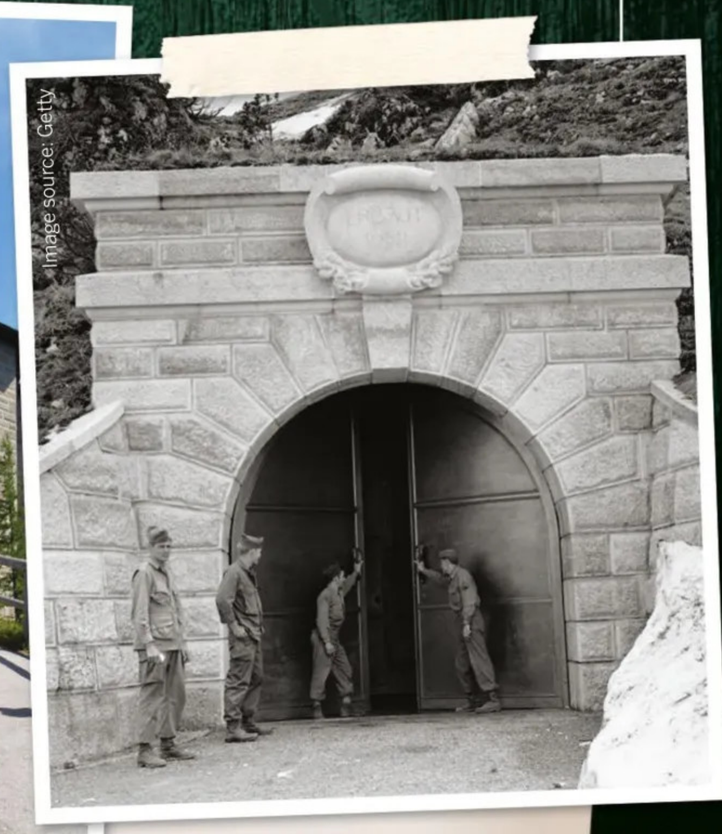


Image source: Getty

WORLD'S WORST PRISONS

From the cells of notorious crooks to sites of unbelievable savagery, these prisons are a reminder of the worst atrocities humans can inflict on each other

Image source: Tres caricatines

ALCATRAZ FEDERAL PENITENTIARY

Welcome to 'The Rock'

Location: San Francisco, California, USA **Time zone:** UTC+8 **Currency:** US dollar

All those films set in this San Francisco Bay prison island haven't prepared you for your first impression of Alcatraz: the prison's a lot smaller than you expect. But that doesn't make it a disappointment. Unlike many former maximum-security prisons, it has a history that dates back to the US Civil War and, since its closure in 1963, it's been preserved as a museum. It began as a military fort before being converted into a military prison, then a federal prison in the early 20th century, where some of America's most notorious criminals were held. Al Capone gradually lost his mind in this place, though that can be attributed to untreated syphilis rather than the stress of a life term. Your trip to the island begins with a boat ride from the harbour across a mile or so of cold, shark-infested water, past the iconic federal penitentiary warning sign to the jetty. Once you've walked up the slipway and entered the hall next to cell block A, you'll quickly be able match your movie scene recollections with the real-life locations – like where Clint Eastwood's character squeezed through the utility void in *Escape From Alcatraz*. We recommend the audio tour – it's surprisingly evocative and packs in far more detail than you'd get from simply marching past rows of empty cells.

Image source: Ralf Baechle

CHÂTEAU D'IF

Not quite the luxurious Gallic getaway its name suggests

Location: Marseille, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro

Like Alcatraz, Château d'If is another island prison that has used the sea as a natural fortification, except the history of this place predates the infamous San Francisco Bay prison by several hundred years. While France used Château d'If as a place to dump many of its political prisoners over the years, its most famous inmate never actually existed: Alexandre Dumas incarcerated the main character of his novel, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, here.
For Château d'If's wealthy and influential inmates, reasonable board and lodging could be purchased for the duration of their stay in cells higher up in the fortress. The poor, however, were crammed into the bowels of the dungeon, 20 prisoners to each damp, chilly and windowless cell.

Image source: wpopp

Image source: wpopp

ROBBEN ISLAND

Famous for housing one of the 20th century's most famous freedom fighters

Location: Cape Town, South Africa
Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Rand

Once a place of pain and oppression, this prison has become a 'symbol of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity', as the prison island where former South African president Nelson Mandela was held for 18 years of his 27-year stretch. The island itself is a two-square-mile, flat patch of idyllic green in Table Bay, just over five miles out from Cape Town.
It became notorious in the 1960s when a maximum security prison was built here to house political prisoners of South Africa's apartheid regime. It closed just 30 years later in 1991, but it's left its taint on this otherwise picturesque island. Tours are available and many of the guides are actually former prisoners.

Image source: Schavda

Image source: KodachromeFan

TOWER OF LONDON

1,000 years of torture and death... supposedly

Location: London, UK
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Pound sterling

Few places have as dark a reputation as the Tower of London. It's been a prison since 1100, though its terrible history has been somewhat embellished over the years. The 'Two Princes', the next royals in line to the throne, were supposed to have been killed here in the 15th century, but it's not until the 16th century that it became a prison of sorts. Even then, torture wasn't often used. Guy Fawkes was stretched on a rack as one of the 'gentler' methods used to extract his confession to the 1605 Gunpowder Plot. The last person to be executed at the Tower was Josef Jakobs, who faced the firing squad in 1941 after being found guilty of spying for Germany during World War II. Today, a Yeoman tour will take you through its dark history, which the Tower of London museum has deemed unsuitable for children.

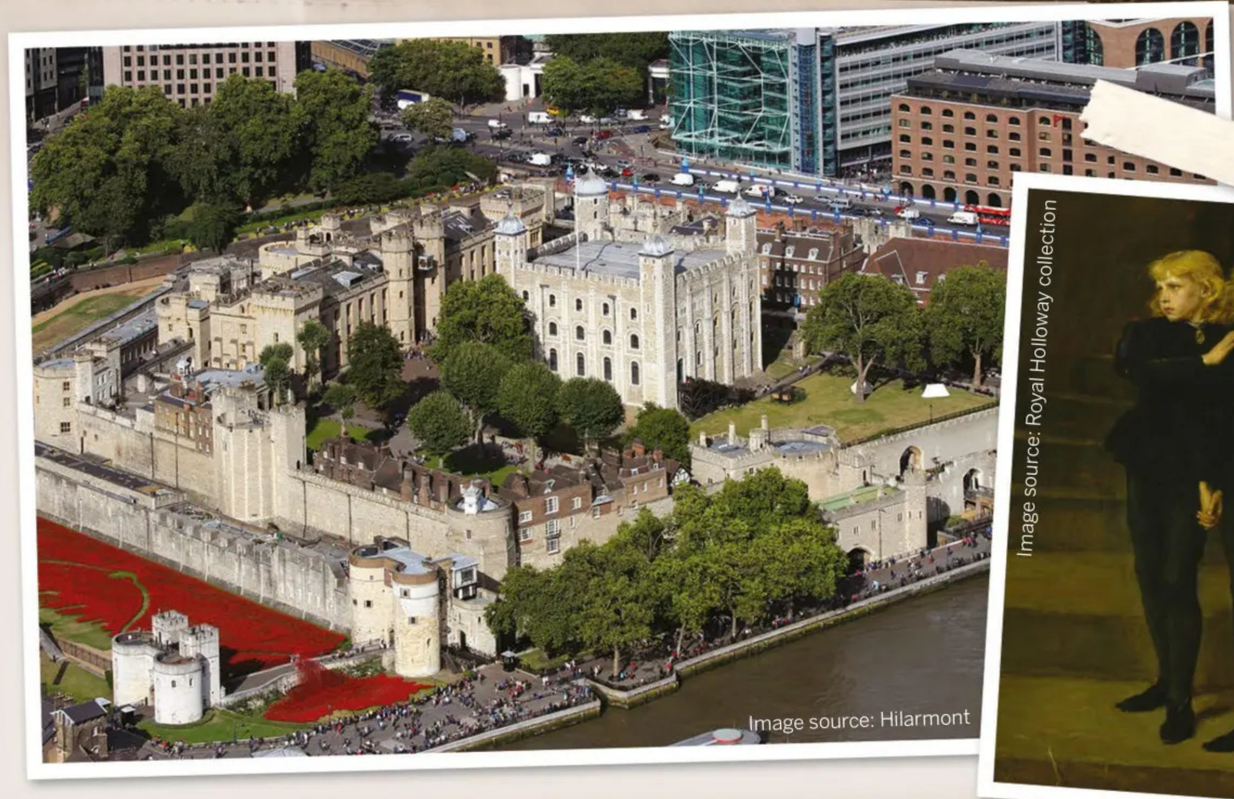


Image source: Hilarmont

Image source: Royal Holloway collection

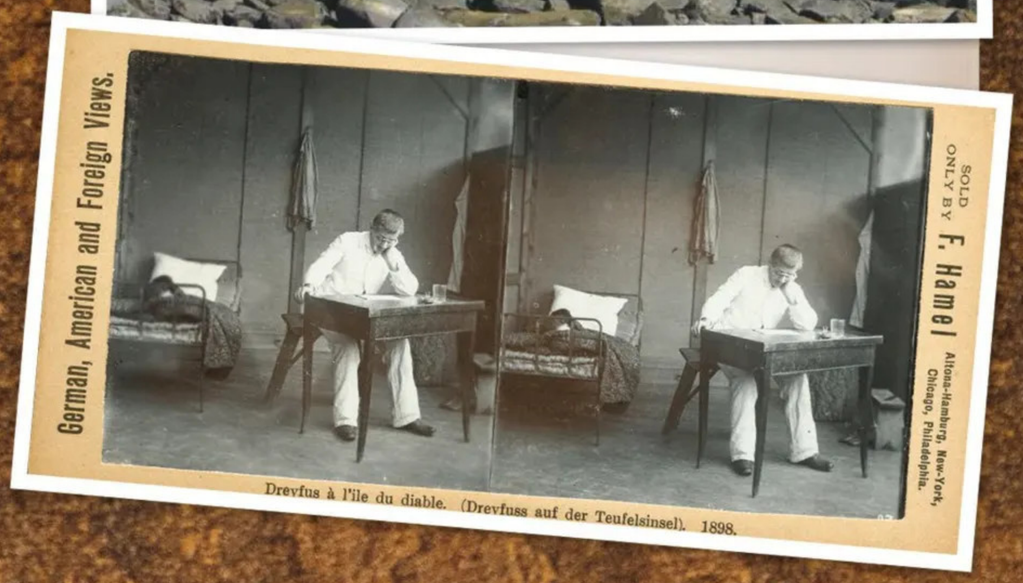
DEVIL'S ISLAND

A suitable name for this former hell-hole

Location: Salvation Islands, French Guiana
Time zone: UTC-3 **Currency:** Euro

When an old empire wanted to dispose of its prisoners en masse, it usually dumped them far away into one of its colonies. That's certainly true of Napoleon-era France, which, in the mid-19th century, emptied its prisons onto a penal colony thousands of miles away across the Atlantic. The prisoners sent to French Guiana were either the biggest political prisoners or the worst of France's crooks and killers. For 100 years until 1953, Devil's Island held prisoners in appalling conditions, where hard labour, unsanitary conditions and insect-borne tropical diseases killed up to 75 per cent of the inmates each year. Today, of course, the Salvation Islands are a tropical paradise for European tourists, with few remnants of their brief but notorious history.

Image source: Philipp Weigell



PORT ARTHUR

Site of one of recent history's worst massacres

Location: Tasmania, Australia
Time zone: UTC+10 **Currency:** Australian dollar

On the south-east coast of the island state of Tasmania is a 19th-century penal colony. Here, the meanest of British criminals were sent, thousands of miles from their homeland, to suffer and slave in a strange country. Some of the cruellest physical and mental punishments were devised to keep its inmates in check. Port Arthur was closed in 1877 and became a world heritage site in 1987, but as if its dark history wasn't enough, it became the site of a killing spree in 1996, when Martin Bryant opened fire on tourists and staff in a cafe before moving through the site, shooting as he went. He murdered 35 people.

Image source: Ezbenz

Image source: Nabokov

TUOL SLENG

The black heart of Cambodia's evil Khmer Rouge regime

Location: Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Time zone: UTC+7 **Currency:** Cambodian riel

Cambodia's notorious communist Khmer Rouge party only held power in the country from 1975 to 1979, but in that short time it earned its leader, Pol Pot, a reputation as one of history's worst dictators. The moment the Khmer Rouge won the civil war, they set about 'cleansing' Cambodia's cities of political opponents and racial 'impurity' in a genocide that claimed the lives of up to three million people. Tuol Sleng was the centre of torture and interrogation, where 1,500 people could be held at any one time. At least 20,000 people were held here and sometimes the entire families of dissidents were interrogated before being 'exterminated'.

Image source: Michael Gruijters

Image source: Adam Carr

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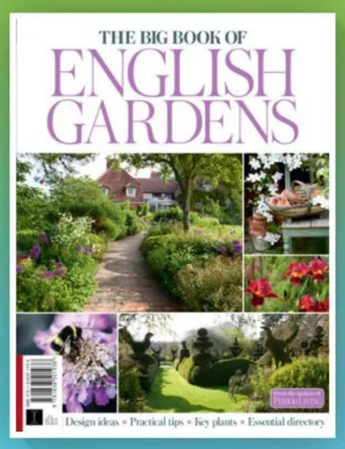

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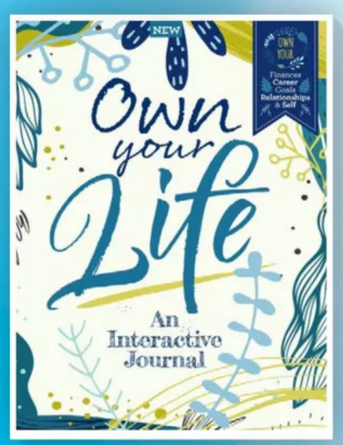

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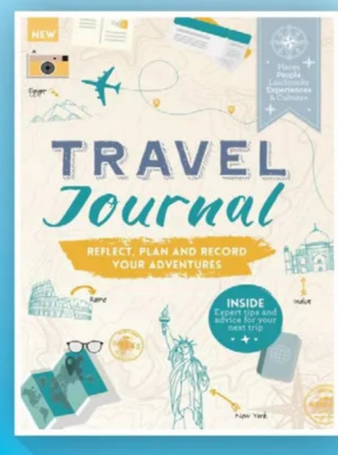

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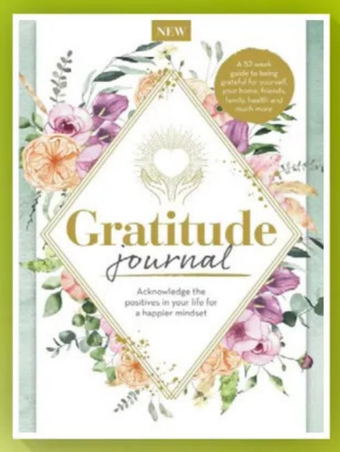

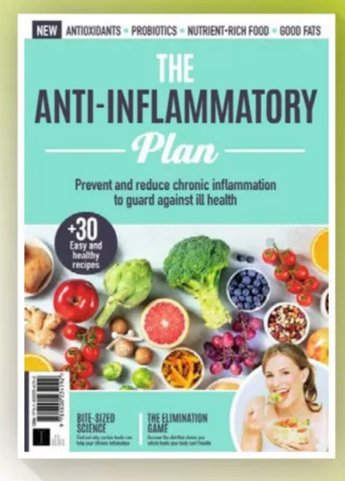

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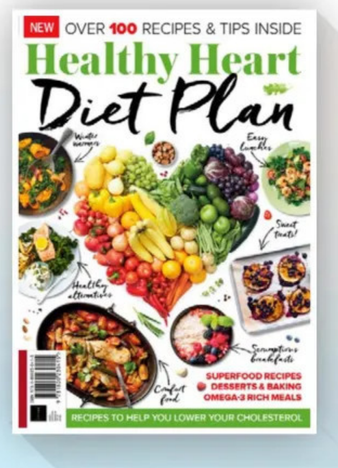

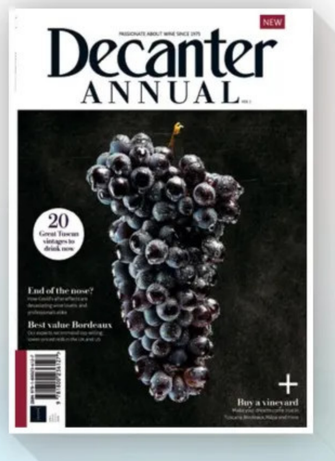

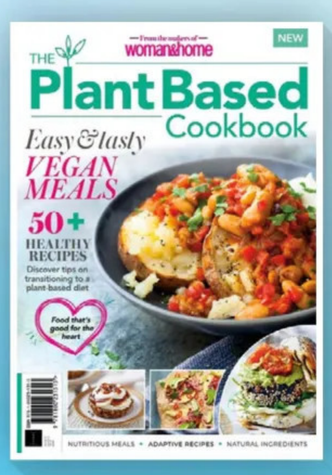

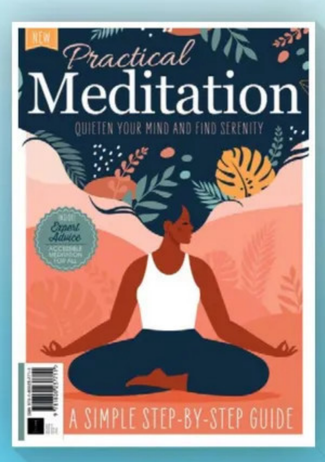

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